This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

**Usage guidelines**

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

**About Google Book Search**

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES
3 3433 07609100 2

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

To Sanna
for her birthday
May 11th 1910
from Billy.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY

ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
R L

Digitized by Google

[See p. 20

"I THOUGHT YOU WOMEN NEVER PLAYED FOR PRIZES"

Digitized by Google

# THE WINNING LADY

## AND OTHERS

BY

MARY E. WILKINS FREEMAN

ILLUSTRATED

HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
MCMIX

Digitized by Google

[See p. 20

"I THOUGHT YOU WOMEN NEVER PLAYED FOR PRIZES"

Digitized by Google

# THE WINNING LADY

## AND OTHERS

BY

MARY E. WILKINS FREEMAN

ILLUSTRATED

HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
MCMIX

Digitized by Google

996417A

Copyright, 1909, by HARPER & BROTHERS.

*All rights reserved.*

Published October, 1909.

Digitized by Google

# CONTENTS


| | PAGE |
|---|---|
| The Winning Lady | 3 |
| Little-Girl-Afraid-of-a-Dog | 35 |
| The Joy of Youth | 71 |
| Billy and Susy | 103 |
| The Selfishness of Amelia Lamkin | 125 |
| The Travelling Sister | 175 |
| Her Christmas | 209 |
| Old Woman Magoun | 243 |
| Eliza Sam | 281 |
| Flora and Hannah | 307 |
| A New-Year's Resolution | 321 |


B|EB 19FEB'36

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# ILLUSTRATIONS


"I THOUGHT YOU WOMEN NEVER PLAYED FOR PRIZES" . . . . . *Frontispiece*

"MOTHER SENT THESE EGGS," SAID EMMELINE, IN A SMALL, WEAK VOICE . . . . . *Facing p.* 52

IT WAS THE FIRST TIME HE HAD EVER INVITED A GIRL TO GO ANYWHERE . . . . . " 76

"THIS IS SUSY. YOU HAVE GOT MY CAT," INSISTED SARAH . . . . . " 106

SHE FAINTED CONSIDERATELY, AS SHE HAD ALWAYS DONE EVERYTHING ELSE . . . . " 140

THE SISTERS DISCOURSED OF THE WEATHER . " 186

"WHERE DID THAT STOCKING COME FROM?" GASPED JOE . . . . . " 236

"MEN IS DIFFERENT," SAID SALLY JINKS . . " 244


Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# THE WINNING LADY

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# THE WINNING LADY

MRS. ADELINE WYATT stood before her long mirror. She held a silver-framed hand-glass, and she surveyed her head crowned with a pretty toque at every possible angle. Adeline was always conscious of exercising stern heroism when she stood before her mirror. She spared herself nothing. She looked unflinchingly at every crease in her chin, every crow's-foot about her eyes, every hollow in her cheeks, also the little sprays of marks, as if made by some tiny besom of time, beneath her ears. She faced the worst, and as far as possible, without the use of arts which she despised, she remedied defects. She practised before her mirror exactly the carriage of head and arrangement of hair which were most becoming. When her gloves were adjusted she was complete, as



Digitized by Google

perfect a figure of a middle-aged woman as one could find. She wore a charming gown of prune color. Her toque was of prune-colored velvet trimmed with a knot of violets, in the midst of which nestled a pink rose. After Ellen had helped her on with her coat she practised holding up her long skirt, for she was to walk to Mrs. Charles Lennox's, where the Whist Club met that afternoon. The Wyatts kept no carriage, and Adeline never hired one from the livery-stable when she could possibly avoid it. Her husband, Thomas Wyatt, was a comparatively rich man, but very parsimonious. Adeline had nothing to spend upon her own personal expenses except the tiny income derived from her inheritance from her father. That was uncertain. She never quite reached two hundred a year at the most, but Thomas Wyatt thought that a very large sum for a woman to spend upon herself. He thought she ought to save some of it. He allowed her ten dollars per week for household expenses, and considered himself very generous. There were only four in the family, including Ellen, the maid. Thomas Wyatt's nephew, Walter Wyatt, had lived with his uncle ever since his parents' death when he was a child, and Thomas loved him as his



Digitized by Google

own son. Walter had opened a tiny law office on the main street of the village, and was struggling hard to succeed and enable himself to marry Violet Ames and support her comfortably.

Thomas Wyatt in one respect was not parsimonious. He had never dreamed of charging young Walter a penny for his board. Adeline, although she would have been distressed had her husband proposed such a measure, was sometimes surprised, and occasionally she did consider, when she saw Walter taking flowers to Violet and smoking cigars, how many things she needed in her home—that is, æsthetic things. All the essentials were hers. She was what is called "a splendid manager." How Adeline Wyatt contrived to dress and set her table upon her income would have puzzled a financier. She might have made the matter plainer had she told of her sleepless hours of planning, and her supervision of every item purchased, and her countless schemes for saving. The prune-colored gown which she wore the day of the whist party was seven years old. It had been daintily wrapped in tissue-paper and laid away until the wheel of fashion turned. Adeline did not believe in spending money upon re-



Digitized by Google

modelling. Now long, tight sleeves had come into vogue again, and everybody would think the gown new. When she was on the street she held it up carefully, almost too carefully, and two little girls playing on the sidewalk stared at her display of black stocking, and giggled delightedly.

Adeline was one of the last to reach the Lennox house. After she had entered the large room and taken a seat, she regarded many of the other ladies with a somewhat pharisaical feeling. She noticed that a hook gaped on the collar of a lady at another table, also that Mrs. John Sears' lace waist bloused much more than the style allowed, and that the sleeves were short, and Mrs. Sears' arms very thin to be displayed. She gave the slightest glance of sweet complacency at her own nice prune-colored sleeves, with their very much up-to-date ornament of fringe which she had made herself. Then Mrs. Ames, Violet's mother, who was her partner, noticed the glance, and also viewed the prune-colored gown admiringly.

"If you will allow me to say so, what a perfectly charming gown you have," she said.

"Thank you, dear," replied Adeline, sitting



Digitized by Google

very straight, and conscious in every nerve of her body of her prune-colored daintiness.

"You always have such lovely clothes," Mrs. Ames went on.

"You have pretty clothes yourself," said Adeline.

Mrs. Ames gave a slightly self-conscious glance at her own sleeves, which her dressmaker had just remodelled. "*I* always wear black, and that is the reason why people cannot tell when my gown is old," replied Mrs. Ames. "But you wear different colors."

Adeline smiled. She did not state that she wore only two colors—gray and prune. She was a subtle woman, and that choice of two colors had been subtle. She could be as economical and more so in her two colors than Mrs. Ames in her invariable black, and nobody would suspect her of economy. She felt quite superior to Mrs. Ames, although she was fond of her for her own sake, and especially as Walter's prospective mother - in - law. Mrs. Ames' daughter Violet was there that afternoon, but she was not playing. Violet Ames was one of the sweet, unselfish young girls who immolate themselves for the sake of their elders. Violet, with her periwinkle-blue eyes, exactly matched



Digitized by Google

oy her little blue-satin gown and her blue feather in her hat, flitted from one table to another, passed the bonbon-dishes, and made herself generally useful. There was more excitement this afternoon than usual, for there were prizes. Generally bridge was played without prizes, because of a covert fear among the ladies that bridge was a wicked gambling game. But Mrs. Charles Lennox had come out openly with prizes, and such prizes! Mrs. Ames had called Adeline's attention to them at the first. "My dear," she said, "have you seen the prizes?" She had touched upon a childish weakness of the other woman's which had survived the passage of time. In most people there are childish weaknesses, or traits, which survive time, and are unconquerable by it. In Mrs. Adeline Wyatt a love for presents and prizes which had been strong during her childhood endured in full force. If she had worn amid her smooth grayish elderly tresses one round shining curl of babyhood, it could not have been more marked than that trait in her soul.

She turned eyes of a child upon the prizes, which were displayed upon a table between the front windows, then she gasped. "You don't mean," said she, "that—?"



Digitized by Google

"Yes," said Mrs. Ames. "That cut-glass punch-bowl is the first prize, and the second prize is that set of Shakespeare. It does seem to me rather funny that Mrs. Lennox should think Shakespeare beneficial to people who play bridge badly." Mrs. Ames had a fine sense of humor. Adeline Wyatt had none whatever. She took everything very seriously.

"That is a beautiful set of Shakespeare," said she, "but that *punch-bowl!*" she gasped.

"Yes," assented the other woman. "It's a beauty, and it must be good cut-glass, too, if Alice Lennox bought it."

Adeline Wyatt sighed. The charming facets of the glass punch-bowl looked to her admiring eyes like those of a diamond. It stood in a window in full sunlight, and beautiful rose tints gleamed here and there from its convexities. Adeline Wyatt's eyes had a strange expression. All her life she had been good and honest, never consumed by unholy longings, for her childish delight in presents and prizes could not be called unholy. It was simply primitive and naïve. Now, however, it took a different phase. Positive lust for that punch-bowl gleamed in Adeline's eyes. It happened to be the one treasure of all



Digitized by Google

treasures which she immediately coveted. She wished to give soon a reception in honor of her dear Walter and his Violet, and fruit punch was of course a necessity at such a function. Everybody in Rawson had fruit punch at receptions. Adeline had heretofore borrowed Mrs. Frank Jennings' punch-bowl, but upon the last occasion of her doing so she had resolved that it was too much of a sacrifice to her pride. Either Mrs. Jennings had said something disagreeable, or had been reported so to have said, and Adeline had made up her mind not to borrow her punch-bowl again. She had thought of borrowing one belonging to Mrs. Lennox, but that was supposed to represent such enormous value that she was afraid. Mrs. John Sears owned a punch-bowl. Mrs. Sears' daughter Jessie had earned it by scouring Rawson and neighboring towns for subscribers for a certain brand of soap. Mrs. Sears esteemed the bowl highly, but Adeline had doubts. It was decorated crockery, and its origin was so widely known that it was not in much request. Nobody could say positively of a glass bowl that it did not belong to the giver of a tea, but Mrs. Sears' treasure, with its decoration of splashy roses in crude hues, was unmistakable.



Digitized by Google

Adeline had not seen her way clear toward giving a tea on account of the lack of a punch-bowl. "I ought to give an afternoon tea for Violet, now everybody knows that she and Walter are engaged," she had remarked, tentatively, to her husband.

"Well, why don't you?" he had replied.

"There are various reasons," said Adeline. "There are some things I ought to own to give such an affair properly."

"Why don't you get them?" asked Thomas.

"I need a punch-bowl, and a really good one *costs*."

"Oh, get a good one while you are about it," said Thomas, and he spoke with such entire unconsciousness that Adeline gave a responsive murmur and said no more. She dared not ask Thomas to buy a punch-bowl. He had such entire faith in the inexhaustibility of her small resources that he had infected her own line of thought. She really wondered if she might not have money enough to buy the bowl. She had endeavored to retrench in various ways, but had not been successful. She had had a hard struggle to keep Ellen from leaving, because when she worried about the size of the butter bill, Ellen had imagined that her mistress sus-



Digitized by Google

pected her of taking it home to her married sister.

It seemed now to Adeline Wyatt (although she shuddered a little at the possible sacrilege of the fancy) that Providence had interposed. There stood the punch-bowl, radiating colors like a diamond. She had only to—play for it. Adeline set her mouth hard, a furrow which she usually suppressed came between her eyes, and she played. The worst of it was, she was neither a good player nor did she hold high cards. As for trumps, she had not even the advantage of chicane. When the first rubber was finished, Adeline had held exactly one honor in trumps, and that a ten-spot, and her partner had not fared much better.

Mrs. Ames, who was optimistic, and did not care about a punch-bowl, who had, in fact, on several occasions given teas, and set out a little table with cups already filled, and a pressed glass pitcher of punch to refill them (she was economizing for Violet's trousseau), only laughed gayly when the two winning ladies passed on to a higher table, and left her and Adeline seated in ignominy. "Small chance we have of that punch-bowl," she remarked, and laughed again.



Digitized by Google

Adeline did not laugh. "No human being can win with the cards we have held," she returned.

"My last hand was not very bad," said Mrs. Ames. "I think I made a mistake in leading clubs."

As she spoke she changed her place, and Miss Judith Armstead came to play with Adeline, and Mrs. Austin Freer against her. Adeline tried to speak pleasantly to Judith, who was elderly, always wore her thin hair the same way, and played bridge about as successfully as she could have flown. She knew there was no chance for her as far as her partner was concerned. Judith had acquired bridge too late in life. She was of abnormal conservatism, and might have carried off all honors at checkers played in her teens, but at bridge she was a dismal object.

However, she sat up very straight, showed all her cards to Mrs. Freer, who had a sly, sidewise glance for them, and, it being her deal, passed a no-trump hand of four aces to Adeline. Poor Adeline had one heart and four spades, ten high, and she made it spades, and Mrs. Freer doubled; she had a long heart suit and a guarded king in clubs. When it was over, Adeline glared at Judith.



Digitized by Google

"Why didn't you make it no trumps—you had four aces?" she demanded.

"I had no side cards," replied Judith, undisturbed. It was easy for her to be undisturbed. She boarded, and had no need for a punch-bowl. But although a truism, fate is ironic. All that afternoon Judith Armstead, who did not know how to play, held the cards. Adeline, sometimes winning, glanced frequently at Judith's score. It was assuming phenomenal proportions. Violet Ames, moving from one table to another, also kept watch of Judith's score. Each lady had her own score, with a little colored ribbon and pencil attached. The ladies said among themselves that Judith Armstead was sure to win the prize. Adeline, after a little, kept her score hidden, tucked in the lace of her bodice. Her delicate, well-preserved face wore an expression which was almost like a mask. Often the other ladies would glance at her wonderingly and not know why they did so. Adeline had her mouth fixed in a smile; her eyes were always intent, crafty. She played as she had never done before, and her luck was better, but always at the end of a rubber Judith waved her little blue score-card with a fatuous, irritating smile. Judith began to grow



Digitized by Google

excited. Every time she gathered in a trick she chuckled offensively. She antagonized even the ladies who did not care so much about winning the bowl. Adeline, even if she were at another table, never once lost sight of that blue score. She never failed to hear Judith's latest record proclaimed in her high, cackling tone of triumph, and always she evaded a direct answer to inquiries respecting her own, and always she kept the score hidden in her bodice lace. The time drew near for the close of the play. The last rubber had begun, and now Adeline was playing with the worst player in the club, Mrs. Leonidas Bennett, who did not approve of bridge, and felt a qualm of conscience every time she put down a card. Mrs. Bennett had a firmly fixed conviction that she must always play second hand high, and that she was a great sinner even while doing that, and the results were, even with good hands, disastrous. Adeline had for opponents Judith Armstead, flushed with victory, her long score dangling ostentatiously from her passementerie trimming, and Mrs. Austin Freer, who knew how to play. Adeline was lucky enough to secure the deal, but her hand was hopeless, and she knew if she passed it to her partner it would be worse, so



Digitized by Google

she made it spades in her own hand, and Mrs. Freer doubled. Adeline's smile never relaxed, but a deadly animosity shot through her at the sound of Mrs. Freer's quiet card-voice saying that she would double spades.

There was a nervous tension all over the room. The gambling atmosphere reigned. These village women were playing for high stakes, and traits of roystering ancestors who had slumbered for generations awoke. Mild, middle-aged eyes gleamed, red spots appeared upon cheeks, sweet middle-aged mouths grew stern, but Adeline Wyatt wore the face of the true warrior of fate. No red spots upon cheeks betrayed her inward excitement, her mouth never relaxed from its smile, her eyes never lost their expression of sly, calm watchfulness. Toward the last of the rubber Adeline and her partner held such extraordinarily good cards that even stupid play prevailed. Adeline held repeatedly four aces. She always made no trumps on her own and every past make, and doubled her opponent's. She by this last sunset glow of victory made her attempt at deception successful. Yes, poor Adeline Wyatt, who had been all her life a virtuous and God-fearing woman, now fell for the first time before the



Digitized by Google

snare of a glass punch-bowl. It was only a very, very little thing which she did—merely the changing of the numeral six to eight. It required only one little curving stroke of her pencil. It was not exactly a perfect eight, but it could not be mistaken for anything else, and it raised her score to an amount sufficient to overbalance Judith Armstead's.

Mrs. Lennox came around to collect the scores then, and Violet Ames and Mrs. Lennox's maid and a niece of Judith Armstead spread the tables with nice little embroidered cloths, and served ice-cream and cake and coffee. Afterward there was a hush, and Mrs. Lennox's slightly affected although pleasant voice arose.

She announced that Mrs. Thomas Wyatt, as the winning lady, had a claim to the first prize, and Miss Judith Armstead to the second. There was a booby prize, a book on bridge, which Mrs. Leonidas Bennett won, and there was a subdued titter as her name was read. Adeline did not titter. She had her mind intent upon the figures of the scores as read by Mrs. Lennox. Judith Armstead, after all her boasting, had either been misunderstood by her, or those last no-trumpers had counted for more than she had reckoned.



Digitized by Google

Adeline had cheated at cards. She had added to her score, and for no purpose. She would have won in any case. Judith's score would not have equalled hers by many points. When the great glass bowl was brought and set carefully on the table before Adeline, she rose and bowed vaguely in response to the murmur of congratulation. Judith Armstead was also rising and bowing. Adeline heard her remark that she had always wanted to own a set of Shakespeare, but she heard her as through a mist, and she saw her new punch-bowl as through a mist. She began to realize what she had done, now that the excitement of the deed was over. She had not only done a dishonest deed, but she had done it without need. She would have been the winner in any case. It was bad enough to have fallen from her standard of self-respect, but to have fallen without any reason! Adeline realized that she was not only a sinner, but a fool, and her realization brought her agony. When she had entered Mrs. Lennox's house that afternoon she had been a good, handsome, happy, self-satisfied, within-the-limits-of-virtue woman. She would leave it a fool and a sinner; that she was becomingly clad in prune-color would make not a whit of dif-



Digitized by Google

ference. Adeline lost all sight of her external self; she saw only her miserable naked soul, which had sold itself for a miserable glass bowl that it could have owned without perjury.

Ever afterward Adeline's memory of that terrible afternoon seemed to stare her in her mental eyes like a concentrated light. She could never forget the smallest detail. No matter what came to her afterward of joy or sorrow, the dinning memory of that time sounded always within her consciousness. She remembered exactly what this one said, what that one said, the various expressions of the various faces regarding her and her dishonestly acquired bowl. She remembered how Judith Armstead looked with her set of Shakespeare. Mrs. Lennox sent Adeline and Judith home with their prizes in her carriage, drawn by a sleek bay horse and a sleek gray, and driven by a coachman in green livery. The bowl and the set of Shakespeare were upon the seat opposite the two ladies. Neither talked much; indeed, it was only a short drive to Adeline's home. Judith lived farther. All that either woman said was to exchange remarks upon the pleasantness of the occasion. Neither said a word about her prize. When Adeline reached home



Digitized by Google

she saw her husband looking out of a sitting-room window and beckoned, and he came out at once to the carriage.

"Will you please take this in?" said Adeline, in a strained voice.

Thomas stared. "Did you stop at the store on your way home?" he inquired.

"No," replied Adeline. "This is—a prize."

Thomas reached in and lifted out the bowl. He glanced at the books. "Did you win these too?" he inquired of his wife, after speaking to the other woman.

"No," said Adeline. "Miss Armstead won those."

"Oh!" said Thomas.

When he and Adeline were in the house, and he had set the bowl on the table, he looked rather wonderingly at his wife. "I thought you women never played for prizes," he observed.

"We don't, generally," said Adeline, "but Mrs. Lennox had prizes this afternoon."

"I don't see why you didn't buy a punch-bowl if you wanted one, instead of getting one after this fashion," said Thomas, examining the prize. "I don't think much of this, anyway; don't believe it cost more than three



Digitized by Google

dollars and ninety-eight cents. You ought to have paid at least five dollars and got something worth while."

"Thomas Wyatt!" gasped Adeline. "You don't suppose Mrs. Charles Lennox would give a bowl that cost only three dollars and ninety-eight cents for a prize!"

"I don't believe it cost a cent more," said Thomas, stoutly. "It is always the people with most means who buy the cheapest things." Then he settled down to his newspaper, while Adeline went up-stairs to take off her things, with her mind dwelling upon this new contingency. She knew absolutely nothing about cut glass. Could it be possible that she had bartered away her honor and self-respect for three dollars and ninety-eight cents? An old bit of pious doggerel of her childhood came into her mind:

> "It is a sin to steal a pin,
> Much more to steal a greater thing."

Had she stolen the pin?

When Walter Wyatt came home he examined the bowl, and he differed with his uncle. He thought the bowl had cost more than three dollars and ninety-eight cents. "She may have



Digitized by Google

paid five dollars for it," he said, examining it critically. Adeline, who knew what good cut glass was worth, shivered.

After supper Walter went out as usual to call upon Violet Ames. He came home in a short time. He had not been gone half an hour when he entered the house, slammed the front door after him, and rushed heavily up-stairs to his room.

"What is the matter?" said Thomas.

"I am sure I don't know," replied Adeline, uneasily. She had no reason for her surmise, but somehow she connected this unusual circumstance with the bowl.

"Maybe they have had a falling out," said Thomas. "Well, they will get over it." Then he resumed reading and smoking.

Adeline was doing some fancy-work. The bowl had been put away in the parlor, but always she saw it, every point in the rosettes and whorls gleaming out with their colored lights. She worried about Walter. After a while she went up-stairs, and Walter opened his door and spoke to her. He was pale, and his hair was ruffled wretchedly with his despairing fingers.

"Violet has broken our engagement, Aunt



Digitized by Google

Adeline," he said, in a choking voice—"that is, she has made a condition which I can't agree to for years to come, and it isn't fair to her to make her wait. I never was cut out to be a dog in the manger."

Adeline was as pale as he. "What is the condition?" she asked.

"She says she will not come here to live, as we have planned. She is as set as can be about it. And I can't keep her decently for years unless she does. I won't take a girl like her to live in any old place, though she did say she didn't care where she lived as long as it wasn't here, and I won't be taken into her house to live, either."

Adeline listened, standing very stiff.

"Did she give you any reason?" she said.

Walter shook his head angrily. "No; she was as obstinate as a mule. A girl is the very dickens when she gets anything into her head."

"If I were you I would go to bed, and try and keep calm to-night and get some sleep," said Adeline. "Maybe she will think better of it."

"Oh, Aunt Adeline, will you see her, and try to make her listen to reason? She has always thought everything of you."



Digitized by Google

"Yes, I will," replied Adeline.

The next morning Adeline sent Ellen with a note to Violet, and soon the young girl came, walking wearily. Adeline was at the front door to greet her.

"Good-morning," she said, in a curious, scared voice.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Wyatt," replied Violet. Her young face was pale and wan. She evidently endeavored to speak with dignity, but succeeded only in speaking piteously. Adeline knew that Violet knew.

"Come up-stairs to my room, please," said she.

The sitting-room door stood open, and Adeline saw the young girl glance in as she passed, and she knew what she feared to see there. When they were in her room she closed the door, and she and Violet stood looking at each other. It was strange, but the innocent eyes fell before the guilty ones, fell with a sort of horror and shame at what she saw.

Adeline was very pale, but she spoke firmly. "Did you tell Walter that you would not come here to live on account of *me?*" she asked.

"Yes," replied Violet, in a dull voice; but as she spoke the crimson flooded her soft



Digitized by Google

young cheeks. "Yes, I was standing behind you."

"And you saw?"

Violet nodded.

"And you don't feel as if you could bear to come here and live, and must break with Walter?"

Violet nodded, her lips quivered, but she did not weep.

"I don't blame you," said Adeline, "but I have to live with myself. I can't help it."

"Oh, what made—" began the girl, in a piteous voice.

"I don't know— What makes any one do wrong? The devil, perhaps."

Suddenly Violet threw her arms around the older woman's neck and clung to her. "Oh!" she moaned, "it is awful. Poor Walter! He looked so, but it did seem as if I couldn't."

Adeline looked at the fluffy head upon her shoulder, and stood very stiff and straight. "You would not need to see much of me," she said. "I think Thomas would finish off another kitchen. You know this is a large house."

"Oh, say you are sorry."

"Sorry!" echoed the older woman. "You



Digitized by Google

don't doubt that! Why, I would gladly die this minute to undo it. But how can I?"

Violet sobbed.

"I lay awake all night thinking how I could make amends," said Adeline. "God knows I am perfectly willing as far as I am concerned to tell Thomas, and then to tell the whole club, and give that awful bowl up. But how can I? It would kill Thomas. I am not afraid of his anger, but I am afraid of making him miserable all the rest of his life. It must be my punishment that I can't tell. There is only one thing I can think of to make amends—that is, partial amends."

"What is it?" sobbed Violet. "Oh, dear Aunt Adeline, I know you didn't mean to do it!"

"Yes, I did. Don't excuse me that way, my dear. The minute I saw that bowl I meant to have it by hook or crook. I never felt so in all my life before. Now I know how people who break laws and do wrong feel. I shall never be hard on anybody again."

"But you are sorry?"

"Sorry!" said Adeline, and her voice was almost scornful. "Sorry is a poor word for what I feel. If I do the one thing I thought of



Digitized by Google

that I can do, I doubt if it will make any difference."

"What is that?"

"I can tell Judith Armstead and give her the bowl."

"But you would have been ahead, anyway."

"That makes no difference. My intention to rob her was the same."

After Violet went away, Adeline put on her black serge gown and her bonnet and coat, and went to see Judith Armstead. Judith saw her coming. She boarded with her niece at Mrs. Sarah Love's. Mrs. Love kept an exclusive boarding-house wherein were stranded many feminine bits of home-wreckage. Judith ran down-stairs and opened the door. She had much the same scared expression that Adeline had worn at the sight of Violet.

"Oh, it is you, Mrs. Wyatt," she said, in a whisper. "Come up to my room."

Judith had two rooms: one was a bedroom, the other was a sitting-room with a divan bed. Adeline glanced involuntarily at the table, and Judith noticed it.

"No, you won't see them there," she said, in a voice quite hoarse with repressed emotion.



Digitized by Google

"I have put them away. I couldn't stand it. I was coming over to see you."

"I came to tell you that the bowl is yours by good rights," said Adeline, jerking out her words. "I cheated yesterday. I changed a figure six to eight."

To Adeline's surprise, Judith nodded.

"Yes, I knew," said she; "that has been all the comfort I have had—that you cheated too."

Adeline was mystified. "As it turned out, I found that I would have won, after all," she said. "I had a better score, though I didn't know it, but what I did was just as bad. I meant to cheat."

"You didn't have a better score," said Judith. "You would have lost if *I* hadn't cheated too, even if you *hadn't* changed that six to eight."

Adeline stared at her.

"I didn't want that great punch-bowl," said Judith. "What could I do with such a thing? But I have wanted a nice set of Shakespeare ever since I can remember, so I didn't add to my score when I saw I would get the bowl if I did. We both cheated, Adeline Wyatt. There is no getting around it."

The two poor women, convicted of actual



Digitized by Google

sin for the first time in their gentle lives, stared at each other in a sort of duet of horror.

"What can we do?" stammered Adeline.

"I don't see anything to do, except to keep still and bear it," said Judith. "I wish I were free to tell it from the housetops, but I am not. I must think of my poor niece. It would kill her."

"And I have to think of Thomas," said Adeline.

"That will have to be our punishment—keeping still," said Judith; "but there is one comfort."

"What?" asked Adeline, hopelessly.

"We can forgive each other."

Adeline brightened a little. "Do you forgive me for wanting to cheat you?"

"I rather think I do; and do you forgive me?"

"Of course I do, but I didn't want that great big punch-bowl, anyway."

"And I didn't want the Shakespeare."

"But we meant to cheat, just the same, and we did," said Judith, solemnly, "and we forgive each other, and I don't see but that is about the only comfort we can get out of it."

The two women wept a little, and when Adeline left she and Judith kissed each other.



Digitized by Google

The two broken reeds clung to each other for support, the two foolish sinners for strength to bear their sin.

When Adeline reached home she went into the parlor and gazed at the great bowl, which would prick her with its facets all her life. She would have liked to take the hammer to it. She hated it. She determined that she, like Mrs. Ames, would use a pitcher for her fruit punch, and then the door opened, and Mrs. Charles Lennox entered. Adeline had not heard the bell ring, and Ellen admitted her with no ceremony. Mrs. Charles Lennox, who was rather magnificently arrayed in a long mink coat, cast an embarrassed glance at the bowl.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Wyatt," she said. Then she plunged directly into her subject. "I am glad I caught you looking at that miserable bowl," said she, "for I have been feeling very uneasy ever since you won the prize yesterday. I knew you thought it was a cut-glass bowl, and—well, it isn't. It is just imitation, and I got it at a sale in the city for one dollar and ninety-eight cents; and the Shakespeare Judith Armstead got was a bargain, too. The set is not complete. There is no *Hamlet*, and there are two *As You Like Its*. I got that



Digitized by Google

for a dollar and forty-nine cents. I can't tell you how mean I have been feeling. I got the prizes as a sort of joke, anyway. You know we have objected to having prizes, but I happened to come across the bowl and Shakespeare, and got them. Then when I realized that you and Judith had gone off thinking you had real cut glass and a beautiful set of Shakespeare, I knew I would have to make a clean breast of it. Can you ever forgive me, Mrs. Wyatt?"

Adeline sighed a queer little relieved sigh. She was thankful, after all, that it was a pin, and not the greater thing. "I would much rather have this than a real cut-glass bowl," she said. "I sha'n't have to worry about its being broken."

After Mrs. Charles Lennox had gone, Adeline even laughed a little as she looked at the bowl. It might, in the nature of things, not endure forever to torment her with visible proof of her false dealing.

Then Violet came running in, and threw her arms around her, and kissed her. "I came back," said Violet, "to tell you that I remembered, after I went home, how I stole—yes, stole—when I was a little girl, one of my sister Jennie's hair ribbons, and I never told her,



Digitized by Google

because *I* knew that I should never take another as long as I lived, but *she* could not know; and we all live in glass houses, and I have sent a note to poor dear Walter, and asked him to come to-night, and I hope he will forgive me."

"Of course he will. He was about heart-broken last night," said Adeline. Then she added, wistfully: "You will not mind living in the same house with me, after all?"

Violet laughed. "Didn't I just say we all lived in glass houses?" said she. "Yes, we will live together in our glass house and never throw stones." Violet was looking sharply at the bowl. "If Mrs. Charles Lennox had not bought that," said she, "I should say I saw one exactly like it at Jackson's in the city last week for one dollar and ninety-eight cents."

Adeline said nothing. She gazed soberly at the bowl; but the sunlight reflected from its sides cast over her face a rosy glow, as of the joy which comes after sinning and repentance.

Digitized by Google

# LITTLE-GIRL-AFRAID-OF-A-DOG

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

## II

# LITTLE-GIRL-AFRAID-OF-A-DOG

"THE chickens are beginning to lay again," said Emmeline's aunt Martha, "and Emmeline can begin carrying eggs over to the poor Ticknors to-morrow." Martha, who was quite young and pretty, cast a glance of congratulation at Emmeline, as if she were proposing a great pleasure.

Emmeline's mother echoed her sister. "Yes, that is so," said she. "Sydney" (Sydney was the man) "said yesterday that the chickens were laying very well. To-morrow Emmeline shall begin."

"Only think how nice it is going to be for those poor Ticknors, with all those children, to have half a dozen new-laid eggs every day," said Martha, again with that congratulatory glance at her little niece, who sat beside the window, holding her best doll.



Digitized by Google

"We shall be able to send more than that some days, I dare say," said Emmeline's mother. "Maybe, when I go to the store, I will buy a pretty new basket for you to carry the eggs in, dear."

"Yes'm," said Emmeline, in a low voice. She sat full in the glow of the setting wintry sun, and her whole little blond head and delicate face was gilded by it. It was impossible for her mother and her aunt to see that she had turned very pale. She kept her face turned toward the window, too, and when she said "Yes'm" infused a hypocritical tone of joy into the word, although she was a most honest and conscientious little girl. In fact, the joy was assumed because of a Jesuit-like issue of conscience in her inner dealings with herself.

The Ticknors, the poor Ticknors, with the large brood of children, lived about half a mile down the road, and Emmeline's mother and aunt esteemed it a great delight for her to carry eggs to them when eggs were plentiful. Emmeline herself never denied the delight, but God alone knew how glad she was, how wickedly (she told herself that it was wickedly) glad she was, when about Thanksgiving-time, when people naturally wished to use more eggs, the chickens,



Digitized by Google

after the perverse nature of their race, laid fewer eggs, and there were only enough for the family. Then Emmeline had a respite. She grew plumper, and there was more color on her little, soft, curving cheeks. "Emmeline always seems so much better this time of the year," her mother often said; and she never dreamed why it was, although Emmeline could have told her, had it not been for her conscience, which pricked her on in spite of her pains. The Ticknors had a dog—a very small dog, it is true, but with a voice enough for a whole pack—and Emmeline was in mortal terror of him. He always barked at her when she went to carry the eggs, and he always sniffed ominously around her ankles. Sometimes he made bounds of vicious yelping joy at her, almost reaching her face, although he was a little dog. Emmeline was a little girl, small for her age, which was barely ten. She was very much under the dominion, the very loving dominion, of her mother and aunt. Her father was dead. The Ameses—Emmeline's last name was Ames—lived on a small farm, and Sydney managed it. They were regarded as quite rich people in the little village where they lived, and they looked at themselves in that light. Therefore they realized a sense of duty,



Digitized by Google

of pleasurable duty, toward the less fortunate people around them. At that very moment both Aunt Martha and Mrs. Ames were sewing upon garments for poor people—some strong and durable flannelette petticoats of soft pink and blue. Sometimes Emmeline herself was asked to sew a seam on these soft garments, and she always obeyed with the utmost docility, although she did not like to sew very well. She was a sober, reflective little girl, not exactly indolent, but inclined to sit quite still, while her young mind indulged in pryings into the future and conceptions of life and her own little niche in the universal scheme of things, which would have quite astounded her mother and her aunt Martha had they known of it. They saw in Emmeline only a darling, obedient, sweet little girl holding her doll-baby; not as she really was —lit into flame by her own imaginings and the sun. Neither dreamed that, as she sat there and said "Yes'm" so prettily, she was shuddering in her very soul from a most exaggerated fear, stimulated by an imagination entirely beyond theirs, of the Ticknors' little dog.

Soon the copper-gilt glow faded from Emmeline's head and face, and she sat, a pale little shadow in the dusk, until her mother lighted



Digitized by Google

the lamp, and Annie the maid came in to announce supper. Emmeline had not much appetite that night, although there were her favorite fried oysters and waffles. It seemed as if the subject of the eggs and the Ticknors, which caused her to project more plainly her vision of fear concerning the little dog, could not be let alone. They had hardly seated themselves at the table before Annie spoke of the large number of eggs which had been brought in that day. Annie had been with the Ameses a long time, and was considered quite a member of the family. "I think you can carry a dozen eggs to-morrow morning, dear," Emmeline's mother said, happily.

"Yes'm," replied Emmeline.

"Only think what it will mean to those poor Ticknors," said Aunt Martha.

"Yes'm," said Emmeline.

Then Emmeline's mother noticed that the child was not eating as usual. "Why, Emmeline," she said, "you have not half finished your oysters."

Emmeline looked helplessly at her plate, and said that she was not very hungry. She felt that she was wicked because she was not hungry, since she was so afraid of the Ticknors'



Digitized by Google

little dog that she did not want to carry the eggs to them the next morning, when they were so poor and needed the eggs so much.

"If you don't eat your oysters, you must swallow two raw eggs," said Emmeline's mother, suddenly. "Annie, beat up two eggs with a little sugar and nutmeg and a little milk."

Emmeline felt just then more than a physical loathing: she felt a moral loathing for anything in the shape of an egg; but she swallowed the mixture, which Annie presently brought to her, with her usual docility.

"That will be just as nourishing as the oysters," said Aunt Martha. Aunt Martha had on her pretty blue gown. She was expecting Mr. John Adams that evening. It was Wednesday, and Mr. John always came on Wednesday and Sunday evenings. Emmeline knew why. She knew with a shy and secret admiration, and a forecast of Wednesday and Sunday evenings yet to be when some young man should come to see her. She made up her mind that she would wear red on those interesting occasions, which filled her, young as she was, with a sweet sense of mystery and prescience. She gazed at pretty Aunt Martha, in her gown of soft blue, cut out in a tiny square at the neck,



Digitized by Google

revealing her long white throat. She forgot for a second the Ticknors and the Ticknor dog, which represented the genuine bugbear of her childhood. Then the old fear overcame her again. Her mother regarded her, and Aunt Martha regarded her; then the two women exchanged glances. After supper, when they were all on their way back to the sitting-room, Emmeline's mother whispered anxiously in Martha's ear: "She doesn't look well."

Martha nodded assent. "I don't think she has had enough fresh air lately," she said, in a low voice. "It will do her good to take that morning run to the Ticknors'."

"That is so," assented Emmeline's mother. "I'll have her go to bed early to-night; then right after breakfast to-morrow morning, when the air is fresh, she can take the eggs to the Ticknors."

Emmeline went to bed before Mr. John Adams arrived. Her mother tucked her in and kissed her, then blew out the lamp and went down-stairs. Emmeline had said her prayers, introducing, mentally, a little clause with regard to the Ticknor dog. It was a piteous little child codicil to the Lord's Prayer and "Now I lay me," which she always said.



Digitized by Google

After her mother had gone down-stairs Emmeline lay awake staring at the darkness. The darkness very soon seemed to flicker with wild-fire; grotesque faces grinned at her from the midst of this fire, which was and was not. A terrible horror, of which the little bugbear dog was the keystone, was over her. She wanted so to call her mother, to get up and run down-stairs into the lamp-lit sitting-room; but she lay still, stiff and rigid. She had too much self-control for her own good, young as she was. Presently she heard the distant tinkle of the front-door bell, and heard Aunt Martha open the door and greet Mr. John Adams. Again, for a second, her own spirit of joyous prophecy was over her; but after Mr. John Adams and Aunt Martha had gone into the parlor, and she could only hear the faint hum of their voices, she returned to her former state. However, it was not very long before her attention was again diverted. Mr. John Adams had a very deep bass voice. All of a sudden this great bass was raised. Emmeline could not distinguish one word, but it sounded like a roar to her. Then, also, she heard her aunt Martha's sweet, shrill voice, almost loud enough for the words to be audible. Then she heard doors opening, and shutting



Digitized by Google

with almost a slam; then she was certain she heard a sob from the front entry. Then she heard the sitting-room door opened with a fling, then a continuous agitated hum of conversation between her mother and aunt. Emmeline wondered why Mr. John Adams had gone so soon, and why he had almost slammed the door, and what her aunt and mother were talking about so excitedly. Then, as she had not much curiosity, her mind reverted to her own affairs, and again the wild-fire of the darkness flickered and the grotesque faces grinned at her, and all her pleasant gates of sleep and dreams were guarded against her by the Ticknors' little dog.

Emmeline slept very little that night. When she did sleep, she had horrible dreams. Once she woke crying out, and her mother was standing over her with a lighted lamp. "What is the matter? Are you ill?" asked her mother. Her mother was much older than Aunt Martha, but she looked very pretty in her long, trailing white robe, with the lamplight shining upon her loving, anxious face.

"I had a dream," said Emmeline, faintly.

"I guess you were lying on your back," said her mother. "Turn over on your side,



Digitized by Google

darling, and try to go to sleep again. Don't think about the dream. Remember how you are going to carry eggs to those poor Ticknor children to-morrow morning. Then, I know, you will go to sleep."

"Yes'm," said Emmeline; and she turned obediently on her side, and her mother went out.

Emmeline slept no more that night. It was about four o'clock in the morning. The Ameses had quite an early breakfast, at seven o'clock. Emmeline reflected that in three hours she should be up and dressed and at the breakfast-table; that breakfast would take about half an hour; that in about three hours and a half she would be on her way to the Ticknors'. She felt almost as a condemned criminal might have felt on the morning of his execution.

When she went laggingly down-stairs, as Annie played a discordant chime on the string of Japanese bells, she felt weak and was very pale. Her mother and Martha, who herself looked wretched, as if she had been weeping all night, glanced at her, then again at each other. "It will do her good to get out in the fresh air," said Martha, stifling a heavy sigh.



Digitized by Google

Emmeline's mother looked commiseratingly at her sister. "Why don't you slip on your brown gown and go with her, dear?" she said. "You look as if the air would do you good, too."

Annie, coming in with the eggs, cast a sharp glance of mingled indignation and sympathy at Miss Martha. She knew perfectly well what the matter was. She had abnormally good ears, and had been in the dining-room, the evening before, when Mr. John Adams was in the parlor with Miss Martha, and there was a door between, a badly hung door, with cracks in it, and she had heard. She had not meant to listen, although she felt that all the affairs of the Ames family were her own, and she had a perfect right to know about them. She knew that Mr. John Adams had been talking about where he and Miss Martha should live after they were married, and had insisted upon her going to live in the old Adams homestead with his mother and elder brother and two sisters, instead of living right along with Emmeline and her mother and herself (Annie). She considered that Miss Martha had done exactly right to stand out as she had done. Everybody knew what old Mrs. Adams was, and one of the sisters was called quick-tempered, and the



Digitized by Google

elder brother was unmarried, and there was therefore no possible reason why Mr. John Adams should feel obliged to remain at home after his marriage. On the other side, it would obviously be very hard for Emmeline's mother to part with her sister and live alone in her big house with Emmeline and Annie. It was a very large house, and there was plenty of room; whereas the Adams house was small. There could be no question, so Annie thought, and so Emmeline's mother thought, and so Martha herself thought, but she had done right. Martha reasoned it out in her own mind that John Adams could not care so very much for her, or he would not insist upon subjecting her to such discomfort and annoyance as she would evidently experience if she were to live in the Adams house after her marriage.

John had always been frank about his mother's difficult temper and his sister's, although he was a devoted son and brother. He knew, too, that Martha could not have a sitting-room to herself in which to display her wedding treasures, and she could have that in the Ames house. She considered within herself that he could not possibly love her as much as she had supposed, because he had given no reason what-



Digitized by Google

ever for his insistence that she should comply with his wishes except that they were his wishes. Martha had a pretty spirit of her own, and she resented anything like tyranny, even in those whom she loved. So she held her head high, although her eyes were red, and said, in reply to her sister's suggestion, that she rather thought she would not. She thought she would take the ten-thirty train for Bolton and do a little shopping. She wanted to see about a spring suit, and the sooner she got the material to the dressmaker's the better. She said it exactly as if she had not planned to have that same spring suit her going-away costume when she was married. Martha had expected to be married the first of June. It was now March. When she said that about going to Bolton her sister's face brightened, and she gave her a look of pride in her spirit. "So I would," said she. She did not notice at all how Emmeline's face fell. For a second the thought of her aunt's going with her to the Ticknors' and shooing away with her superior courage and strength that dreadful little dog had caused her heart to leap exultantly. But now that chance of respite was gone. She took a spoonful of her cereal, puckering her little mouth most pathetically



Digitized by Google

after she had swallowed it. She did not care for cereal, and only ate it because her mother and aunt said that it was good for her. Emmeline had begun to wonder why so many things which she disliked, and so many things which she more than disliked, were so good for her. She acquiesced in the wisdom of her elders, but she wondered.

She ate her cereal, then her soft-boiled egg on toast. She hated eggs that morning, although usually she liked them. She felt as if she was fairly eating her terror and dread of what lay before her: eggs were so intimately associated with it. It seemed to her that the fear in her heart was enough, without being obliged to have it in her stomach also.

After breakfast Emmeline put on her red coat and hat (she was still wearing her winter garments), and her mother gave the basket of eggs to her and kissed her. "Don't walk too fast and get all tired out, dear," she said.

She and Martha stood at the window watching the gay little figure move slowly down the road. They need not have cautioned her against speed. She did not feel in the least inclined to hurry.

"The child does not look very well this



Digitized by Google

morning," said Mrs. Ames. "She has that old anxious expression again, and she is pale, and she ate her breakfast as if she did not want it."

"Ate it just as if she was swallowing pills," said Annie.

"Yes, she did," Mrs. Ames agreed, anxiously.

"Well, the walk in the fresh morning air will do her good," said Martha. "I must make a start if I am going to catch that ten-thirty train. I must mend my gloves. I think I will wear my brown taffeta. I may call at the Robins's while I am in Bolton."

"I would," said Mrs. Ames. It was tacitly understood between them that nothing more was to be said about Mr. John Adams, that the whole subject was to be left out of sight and hearing, and everything was to go on as before. However, as the last glimpse of red disappeared down the street, and Martha's step was heard overhead, her sister thought how glad she was that she had proposed going to Bolton. "It will take her mind up," she thought, but she would not have said it to Martha for the world.

Meantime, Emmeline continued slowly but none the less surely on her road to the Ticknors'. It was a perfectly straight road for a quarter of a mile, then it curved. It was not



Digitized by Google

until one passed this curve that one could see the Ticknors' ragged, squalid residence. Then one saw it as a blur on the landscape. How Emmeline dreaded rounding that curve! She walked very slowly, toeing in a little, as was her wont when she was nervously intent. She prayed incessantly, and her poor little prayer ran in this wise: "Oh, Father in Heaven, please take care of me, and don't let Spotty come near me nor hurt me nor bark at me." Emmeline repeated this prayer over and over in a sort of rhythmic cadence. She fairly kept step with it, and yet she had not the slightest faith in the prayer. She could not really see why she should have. She had always prayed in such wise while carrying eggs to the Ticknors, and Spotty had never failed to race barking out to meet her, and sniff at her nervous, twitching little ankles and try little nips and tugs at her skirts. The prayer had never, so far as she could see, been answered, and why should she expect it to be now? Emmeline was a very honest little girl. She was reverent, and she believed God could keep Spotty from barking at her; but she did not believe that He would. Moreover, she was Christian enough to hope and trust, somehow, that these agonies of terror which she was



Digitized by Google

called upon to undergo were in the end for her spiritual good. She did not complain, but she knew that she suffered, and she knew that Spotty would not fail to bark.

Presently she turned that dreaded curve of the road, and she could see the wretched place where the Ticknors lived. The dwelling itself was an unpainted, out-of-drawing shanty, leaning so far to one side that it seemed it must topple over, but saving itself by a lurch in another direction. It was a very drunkard of a house, a habitation which had taken upon itself the character of its inmates. It was degenerate, miserable, and oblivious to its misery. Beside this main shanty was a stable, far out of the perpendicular, out of which looked a high-hipped cow. Sometimes Emmeline was afraid of the cow, which was often at large, but never as of the dog. There was also a pigsty and various other horrible little adjuncts of the main whole. Emmeline shuddered as she came in sight of it. The mere aspect of the place would have gotten on her sensitive nerves even if Spotty had not been there. But immeditely, breaking upon her prayer, came the well-known vicious little yelp. Spotty was a mongrel, but he had wondrous ears. Emmeline espied the



Digitized by Google

little animal coming for her so fast that he seemed a mere line of speed, but never ceasing that wild yelp. Emmeline prayed on, and walked on. It was strange that she never at such times thought of turning round and running. It never occurred to her to disobey her mother and not take the eggs to the Ticknors. She walked along, praying, her heart beating heavily, her limbs shaking. The little dog reached her. He was a little dog, and it was a sheer absurdity for her to feel such fear of him. He danced around in circles, a regular dog war-dance, as she advanced. His yelps became louder and louder. It seemed inconceivable that such a small animal could have such a terrific bark. Emmeline went steadily on, toeing in, holding her basket of eggs in a hand which did not feel as if it belonged to her. It did not seem that her whole body belonged to her in any other sense than as a machine which bore her conscience, her obedience, her fear, and the basket of eggs. When she reached the Ticknor house she was blue-white, trembling with a curious rigid tremor. She knocked, and the little dog gave a furious, a frantic yelp, and tugged at her skirt. Then the second of her deliverance came. The door



Digitized by Google

"MOTHER SENT THESE EGGS," SAID EMMELINE, IN A SMALL, WEAK VOICE

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

opened. An enormous slatternly woman, a mountain of inert flesh, appeared. She bade the dog be quiet. He did not obey, but Emmeline had a sense of protection. It had occurred to her more than once that perhaps Mrs. Ticknor, in consideration of the eggs, would, if Spotty actually attacked her, sit upon him; that she would not actually let her be bitten. Behind Mrs. Ticknor the close room swarmed with children—children with gaping, grinning faces, some of them with impudent faces, but most of them placidly inert like their mother. The Ticknors represented the very doldrums of humanity. None of them worked nor progressed, except the father, who occasionally could be induced to do a little work for the neighbors when the supplies ran too low and actual starvation became a temporary goad. To-day he was ploughing for a farmer, plodding lazily along behind a heavy old horse. He could scarcely be said to be working. Emmeline was glad that he was not at home. Sometimes he had been drinking considerable hard cider, and although he never spoke to her, the hard red in his face disturbed her; also the glassy stare of his stupid eyes.

"Mother sent these eggs," said Emmeline



Digitized by Google

in a small, weak voice. Mrs. Ticknor took them with an inarticulate note of thanks, like a dumb beast. The children stared and grinned and gaped. All the dingy room seemed full of staring eyes, and gaping, grinning mouths. The little dog yelped viciously, louder and louder. It was incredible of what a crescendo that small dog was capable. Emmeline pinned her faith on Mrs. Ticknor's coming to her rescue in case of an actual assault, but every minute she expected to feel the needle-like teeth in her ankle. All her flesh shrank and quivered. It seemed as if Mrs. Ticknor would never find a dish in which to deposit the eggs. Finally she did, however, and Emmeline took her basket. The little dog followed, with his circling war-dance and his crescendo of yelps, to the curve of the road. Then, as was invariably the case, he turned suddenly and ran home, as if with a sudden conviction that the game was not worth the candle.

Then Emmeline toed out, and walked on briskly, her head up; her trial for that day was over.

When she reached home her mother looked at her and her face brightened. "You look so much better for your walk, darling," she said.



Digitized by Google

Then she asked if the Ticknors seemed pleased with the eggs. Emmeline was in a little doubt as to the amount of actual pleasure which the Ticknors had displayed, but she said "Yes'm."

"It means a great deal to them, poor things," said her mother. "I am so glad we can help them a little, and so glad you can do your part."

"Yes'm," said Emmeline.

The next morning the torture was repeated. It was like a historical promenade between two rows of Indians armed with cruel weapons. However, she survived it, and when she came home both her mother and aunt remarked upon her improved appearance. That was what so misled them. Every morning Emmeline returned from her charitable trip with such a sense of momentary relief that her face was naturally brighter than when she started, but all the while she steadily lost ground under the strain. Finally the doctor was called in and a tonic prescribed, and when school began, after the spring vacation, it was decided that Emmeline should remain at home, but try to go on with her class with Aunt Martha's assistance.

"I think nothing except that morning walk to the Ticknors', to carry eggs, keeps the poor



Digitized by Google

child up, anyway," said Emmeline's mother, who had followed the doctor to the door.

"I dare say," he replied. "Keep her out in the fresh air all you can, and send her on errands that interest her."

"That does interest her," said Mrs. Ames. "She is so pleased to think she is helping those poor Ticknors, dear little thing."

Emmeline overheard what was said; the door was slightly ajar. There was a curious little twitch about her sensitive mouth. Troubled as she was, she saw the humor in the situation. The very thing which was making her ill, her mother regarded as her chief medicine. It seemed strange that Emmeline did not tell her mother of her true state of mind. The expeditions would have been at once stopped. She did not tell her, however, and probably for reasons which she did not herself understand. There is in every complete personality a side which is dark except toward its own self and God, and Emmeline realized this dark side in herself, although vaguely. She knew perfectly well that nobody, not even her mother, who loved her, could understand rightly this dark side, which was sacred to herself. She knew that if she told her mother how afraid she was



Digitized by Google

of that little Ticknor dog she would be petted and comforted, and would never have to face the terror again; and yet she knew that her mother would secretly laugh over her and not comprehend how she felt, and it seemed to her that she could not face that. She would rather face the dog.

So she continued carrying the eggs and praying, and the little dog continued barking at her and snapping at her heels and tugging at her dress, and she took the doctor's medicine, and yet she grew paler and thinner, and slept less, and ate less, and her mother and aunt thought that the daily walk in the open was all that kept the child up. Then, three weeks after she first began her charitable trips, something happened.

It was almost the first of April, but the spring was very late, and that Wednesday morning had seemed to suffer an actual relapse into winter. The northwest wind blew cold, as if from northern snow and ice fields; the ground was frozen hard, and the farmers had been obliged to quit their ploughing, which they had begun on mild days. The long furrows in a field which Emmeline had to pass before she reached the curve in the road lay stretched out stiff and rigid like dead men. In the midst of



Digitized by Google

that field stood a little corn-house, the door of which was open. Emmeline glanced casually across the field as she lagged along. She still wore her little red coat and hat, under which her soft fleece of blond hair flew before the wind like a flag. She glanced casually, then her heart gave a great leap and seemed to stand still. Over that rigid field she had seen a little live object scamper and make straight for that corn-house, which he entered, doubtless in pursuit of some smaller, swifter thing which she could not see, possibly a field-mouse or a mole. Emmeline knew the pursuer to be the Ticknor dog. A thought leaped into her brain — a thought so wild and audacious that she could not entirely harbor it for a second. Then all her faculties rose to action. Down on the ground she set her basket of eggs. Over the fence, with its tangle of leafless vines, she went, and across the field she raced, her little feet skipping from furrow to furrow, her hair streaming. She reached the corn-house, and grasped the door, swinging outward and creaking in the cold wind, with a grasp of despair. She slammed it to, and fastened it. Emmeline at last had her enemy safe in prison. An angry bark and a scratching assailed her



Digitized by Google

ears as she sped back to the road, but Spotty could not get loose. She was sure of that. It was a strong little house. Emmeline took up her basket of eggs and went on. Nobody had seen her. This was a lonely spot in the road. A mad exultation filled her heart. For the first time she was going to the Ticknors' without fear clutching her, body and soul. When she rounded the curve in the road and came in sight of the squalid little group of buildings they looked almost beautiful to her. She fairly laughed to herself. She almost danced as she went on. When she reached the house and Mrs. Ticknor opened the door as usual she saw for the first time what a really lovely little face the next little girl to the baby had, in spite of dirt. She smiled as she delivered the eggs, and stood beaming while Mrs. Ticknor emptied the basket and returned it. She had no need to look about nor listen for any little spiteful animal now. She was quite safe. She went home light-footed. She was quite rosy when she reached there.

"The dear child is really better," her aunt said to her mother when Emmeline had gone to put away her out-door wraps.

"Yes," said Mrs. Ames, "she certainly does



Digitized by Google

look better, and I do believe it is nothing but that walk every morning in the fresh air has done her good."

"I think so too," said Martha. "I think it has done her much more good than the doctor's medicine."

Poor Martha herself looked, in spite of her pride and her high carriage of head, as if she needed some helpful tonic for either soul or body, or both. She had grown thinner, and although she smiled, the smile did not look spontaneous. In these days Martha smiled mechanically and only with her lips. Her lips curved prettily, but her eyes remained serious and thoughtful, even while she spoke about Emmeline's looking better. Emmeline did, in reality, seem better all that day. She even asked for luncheon between breakfast and noon. She slept well that night. She ate her breakfast with an appetite the next morning, and set out even merrily on her errand to the Ticknors. It was still cold, and the northwest wind had not gone down. It had raged all night. When she came to the field in which the corn-house stood the door was closed fast; no one was at work, and the plough ridges which later on would be green with waving flags of



Digitized by Google

corn lay stiffly like dead men, as they had done the day before. Emmeline looked at the corn-house. She thought, but she was not quite sure, that she heard a little plaintive sound, something between a whine and yelp. When she returned she was quite sure. She knew that she heard it. Her face sobered. When she reached home her mother and aunt exchanged glances, and her mother went into the kitchen to tell Annie to make some beef-tea. Emmeline had to drink a cup of it when it was made. Her mother and aunt had agreed, with dismay, that she did not look as well as she had done the day before. She looked still worse as the day wore on and the days wore on. During three days Emmeline suffered tortures of remorse with regard to the little dog shut up in the corn-house and perhaps starving to death, unless there might be some scattered corn left over from the year before, or rats. Emmeline was not quite sure as to whether Spotty would eat rats, even if reduced to starvation. She astonished her mother on the evening of the second day by inquiring, apropos of nothing at all, "Mother, do dogs ever eat rats?" And when both her mother and aunt seemed unable to answer positively in the affirmative, her little



Digitized by Google

face took on an expression of white misery which amazed them. After Emmeline had gone to bed that night her mother told her aunt that if the child was not better before long she should call in another doctor.

It was horrible for Emmeline during those mornings to pass that corn-house, with its shut door and desolate field. She felt like a murderess. She was not quite sure whether she heard Spotty's plaintive whine. She wondered if he were dead and she had killed him.

It was the evening of the third day that Emmeline made up her mind. Chance favored her. Annie had forgotten to order a yeast-cake, and the fact was mentioned in her presence just before supper. Annie said that she would go to the store after supper and get it, for she must mix bread that night. Then Emmeline spoke eagerly:

"Mother, can't I go? There is plenty of time before supper. Please let me go."

Her aunt abetted her. "I would let her go if I were you," she said. "She will sleep better. The air is lovely, although it is frosty for this time of year." Martha had just come from a walk to the post-office. "There I have been right in the store, and could have got it



Digitized by Google

if I had known," she said; "but I do think it will do Emmeline good to run out, and it will not be dark until after she gets back."

So Emmeline went. She had mysteriously tucked up the sleeve of her red coat a little parcel which contained two chicken bones. They were nice little chicken bones, wrapped in white paper. She carried also her little purse, in which she had some money of her own besides the pennies which her mother had given her to buy the yeast with.

Emmeline flashed out of sight of the house windows, a swift little figure in red.

"I can't make her out at all," Emmeline's mother said. "There she has seemed all down in the dumps for two days and a half, and all of a sudden she is as eager to go to the store as I ever saw her about anything in her life. Her eyes looked as bright as stars."

"If she were grown up, I should think she had something on her mind," Martha said, reflectively.

"Now, Martha, what nonsense! What can that baby, with everything done for her, have on her mind?"

"Of course she cannot," said Martha, but her eyes were reflective.



Digitized by Google

Meantime, Emmeline sped on her way. The store was on a street at right angles to the one leading to the Ticknors', which opened just before the field with the corn-house was reached. Emmeline hurried to the store, bought the yeast-cake, and also with her own money a little paper bag of sweet crackers. Then swiftly, without a moment's hesitation, she ran back to the other road and across the field to the corn-house. She listened for just one second before opening the door. She heard a little whine—not a bark, but a whine. Then she opened the door, and no soldier charging the enemy ever required more spirit than she; but open it she did. She held out the chicken bones. Then she flung them at poor Spotty, emerging trailingly from the dusty interior. Spotty caught at the little bones and crunched them down. Then Emmeline fed him with the sweet crackers. She put one on the ground. Then, as the little animal caught it up, a feeling of great love and pity overcame her. All at once she loved that which she had feared. She fed Spotty the rest of the sweet crackers from her little red-mittened hand, and did not have the slightest quiver of terror, even when the sharp little teeth were so near her fingers. After the crackers were



Digitized by Google

all gone, Emmeline started homeward, and Spotty followed her. He bounded around her, leaping up, barking with joy. He was a poor little mongrel, and from heredity and poor training he had lacked the better traits of his kind. He had been mischievous, cowardly, and malicious. He had loved nobody. But now he loved Emmeline for setting him free and giving him food. He knew nothing of the injury which she had done him. He was conscious only of the benefit. So he followed her, as he had never followed any of the Ticknors. They, in truth, had never cared for him. They had simply been too indolent and too indifferent to turn him adrift when, a poor canine wanderer, he had located himself with them uninvited. But this was different. He loved this little girl, who had opened his prison door and fed him with nice chicken bones and sweet crackers. He had suffered, and she had come to his aid. He was still thirsty, but thirst also would be satisfied by her. He followed her with joyful faith across the field. When they reached the road leading to the store a man emerged thence, walking hurriedly. Emmeline knew him at once. He was Mr. John Adams.

John spoke to Emmeline in a confused



Digitized by Google

sort of way. "Oh, it is you, Emmeline!" he said.

"Yes, sir," replied Emmeline.

"How are your mother and aunt?"

"Pretty well, I thank you."

"Have you been to supper?"

"No, sir."

Mr. John Adams hesitated still more. "Well," he said, "I had my supper early, and so, and so—"

Emmeline glanced up at him, and saw to her amazement that his face was burning red, and he was smiling foolishly.

"I thought," he said, finally, "that I would run up to your house this evening and—I thought I would go early, because—I happened to think it was the evening for prayer-meeting, and I didn't know but she—your mother and aunt might be going, and—I thought if they were —if I went early, I would go along with them."

"Mother and Aunt Martha aren't going to meeting. I heard them say so," said Emmeline. Then she added, out of the innocence of her soul: "I know Aunt Martha will be real glad to see you."

"Do you think she will?" asked Mr. John Adams, eagerly.



Digitized by Google

"Yes, sir."

"I wonder how you would like it if I should come and live in your house, with you and your mother and aunt?" said John Adams.

Emmeline slipped her little hand into his. "I think it would be real nice," she said.

"You dear little soul!" said Mr. John Adams. He squeezed her hand in his big strong one. "Is that your dog, little one?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"I didn't know but you had been getting a pet dog since I was at your house."

"That is the Ticknor dog; he followed me." Just then the dog leaped up, and Emmeline patted his head, laughing.

"He is a mongrel, but he seems a bright little dog," said Mr. John Adams. "I should think you would keep him. He can't have a very good home at the Ticknors'."

"I am going to if mother will let me," said Emmeline, with sudden resolve.

The little triumphal procession went on its way. The west was a clear cold red. They passed a field in which stood scattered stacks of last year's corn. In the shadow the withered blades had a curious vivid crudeness of something which was rather tone than color. They



Digitized by Google

gleamed out like newly cut wood, like naked flesh. They were elemental, belonging to the first: dry death, for which there are no paints on the palette, any more than for light and air and sentient life. But where the red western glow struck these blades of corn they were lit with brilliant reflections, and seemed to leap into flames of red gold.

In the sky was faintly visible a filmy arc of new moon. A great star was slowly gathering light near it. Emmeline danced along, holding to Mr. John Adams' hand. Her head was up. Her whole face laughed. The little dog raced ahead; he ran back; he leaped and barked short joyous barks. They were all conquerors, by that might of spiritual panoply of love with which they had been born equipped. There was the dog, in whom love had conquered brute spite and maliciousness; the man in whom love had conquered self-will. But the child was the greatest conqueror of the three, for in her love had conquered fear, which is in all creation its greatest foe, being love's own antithesis.

Digitized by Google

# THE JOY OF YOUTH

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

## III

# THE JOY OF YOUTH

EMMELINE AMES, going down the village street that winter afternoon, was conscious of a little uncomfortable lump in her right shoe. She was also conscious of an innocent bravado of shame as the lump worked from the hollow of her instep toward her toes. A soft red, and a delicious, silly smile, overspread her face. The lump was composed of some dried sprigs of the plant called boys'-love, or southernwood. Emmeline believed firmly in the superstition concerning it. She was sure that a girl with a sprig of boy's-love in her shoe would marry the first boy whom she met. In summer, when the plant with its long, gray-green, aromatic leaves flourished in the garden, she often wore a sprig in her shoe, and she had secretly pressed some in her own particular books, in order that she might be able to try



Digitized by Google

the charm in the winter-time. Emmeline had too much credulity and imagination to be in a perfectly normal state; or, on the contrary, she may have been too normal, with all her human instincts dangerously near the surface, and as prone to injury as her great-grandmother's egg-shell china teacups.

There was a cousin of Mr. John Adams', whom her aunt Martha had married, who visited often at the Ames house. The cousin's name was Miss Abby Jennison; she was a professor in a girls' college, and rather uncomfortably analytical. One day she told Emmeline's anxious mother that Emmeline was a good example of overgrowth induced by the strain of civilization, and when Emmeline's mother had rejoined that she was such a simple, even primitive, child, Miss Jennison had triumphantly declared that that only confirmed her in her opinion. Emmeline had reverted to an original type. "How long can you keep a pansy from returning to a little heartsease if it blooms season after season in the same garden?" inquired Miss Jennison. "Emmeline is a First Principle, bless her. I adore First Principles."

Emmeline's mother inferred that it must be desirable for a little girl to be a First Prin-



Digitized by Google

ciple, still she felt a little uneasy. One day, after Miss Jennison had returned to her college, she asked her sister Martha, Mrs. John Adams, what she supposed Abby Jennison had meant. Martha was rocking comfortably with her second little girl in her lap. The first little girl was playing on the floor at her feet with six dolls, a very small horse, and a very large woolly lamb. Martha looked smilingly over the golden downy ball of the baby's head. "She meant what most people mean who live on paper and in words," said Martha Adams.

"You don't think she meant that Emmeline was not healthy—too nervous or anything?"

"Of course she is a little too nervous," said Martha. "But what would one give for a child without nerves? Emmeline never begun to have the nerves that my children have." She spoke as if nerves were a distinction, and her sister said no more. She had imbibed a hazy idea that being a First Principle meant being nervous, and that being nervous might be desirable; still, she remained somewhat uneasy. Had she begun to know what went on within Emmeline's little blossoming mind she would have been distracted. Her own child was to her as a sealed casket filled with mysterious



Digitized by Google

processes which were quite beyond her scope. Emmeline reflected much upon topics which her elders considered as being remote from her furthest imaginings. For instance, that sprig of dried southernwood in her shoe would have been incredible to her mother and aunt.

Emmeline walked along, gazing hopefully ahead. She was slight and straight, and carried her delicate chin high. She was very pretty, and she was glad on account of the Boy. She stepped daintily, carefully pointing her toes out. She had a tendency to toe in, which she was trying to overcome. She was going to the store. She had a number of commissions for her mother and aunt.

It was very cold, and the snow, which was trodden hard, gave out silvery creaks underfoot. The fields lay in wide frozen levels of a uniform pearl gray. There were no blue lights, the sky was clouded. The trees stretched out their limbs with a curious stiffness. The bushes, in which were still tangled a few dry leaves, looked brittle. Emmeline came to a large bush, and a swarm of sparrows flew out of it, as if the dead leaves had been assailed by a sudden wind. She walked on, gazing ahead for the Boy whom she should know for



Digitized by Google

her future husband by virtue of that sprig of dry southernwood in her shoe.

Emmeline, as she went on, became very much afraid that this test would end as had former ones. She had been singularly unfortunate in her experiments with boy's-love. Her most intimate friend, Anita Lord, had met Johnny Woodfield while trying the charm, and Emmeline, who had included Johnny in her own list of possibilities, had straightway loyally eliminated him. After that it had seemed as if she were fated to meet Johnny Woodfield when she herself was afield with southernwood aromatically crushed underfoot. Now she saw him approaching, and sighed. It did seem hard that she should inevitably meet a boy who was destined to become the husband of her dearest friend. She spoke rather stiffly to him and was passing on, but Johnny stopped her.

"What's your hurry?" he inquired, affably.

"I have some errands at the store, and I must get home before dark."

"Shucks! loads of time! Say, Emmeline—"

"Well?"

Johnny, who was rather large and stout for his age, hesitated. He shifted his weight from one foot to the other. His cheeks were already



Digitized by Google

crimson with the cold, but a warmer glow of young blood deepened the tint.

"It's a corking cold day, ain't it?" he said at length.

"Awful," returned Emmeline. She looked up in Johnny Woodfield's face. It was a handsome boy-face. She realized that had it not been for Anita, she might—but she shook her head impatiently. She made a motion to pass, then Johnny spoke to the point.

"Say, Emmeline," he blurted out, "don't you want to go to the concert with me tomorrow night?" It was the first time that Johnny Woodfield had ever invited a girl to go anywhere with him, and it was the first time that Emmeline had been invited. It was a tremendous moment for both of them. Emmeline, however, was a girl, and she had her wits about her. She knew exactly what to say, and she said it beautifully.

"Thank you," she said; "you are very kind, but I have a previous engagement."

Johnny Woodfield realized the dignity and finality of the reply. He jerked his cap from his head, which looked pathetically curly. His cheeks blazed. He stood aside for Emmeline to pass. Then the little girl's pitiful heart mis-



Digitized by Google

IT WAS THE FIRST TIME HE HAD EVER INVITED A GIRL TO GO ANYWHERE

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

gave her. She looked at him, and her pretty mouth quivered.

"You aren't mad, are you, Johnny?" she said.

"Of course I ain't," replied Johnny, manfully. "If you have a previous engagement, that settles it."

"I don't think Anita has any engagement."

"Oh, well, I may not go to the concert, anyway," returned Johnny. "Good-evening, Emmeline."

"Good-evening," returned Emmeline. She walked on rather sadly. She had no regrets concerning Johnny, since she firmly believed him to be Anita's property, but she was, of course, facing an irony of fate.

It was not long before she faced another. She saw some one approaching, and her heart leaped. Was it—? A young man jauntily swinging a tightly rolled umbrella came toward her. Emmeline did not raise her eyes until she met him. She was almost sure. When she did look up she encountered the handsome, patronizing eyes of Mr. Lionel Bates, who was going to be married in the spring to Miss Ellen Sylvester. Emmeline knew Mr. Bates. He was a lawyer, and had had business dealings with her mother.



Digitized by Google

"How do you do, little one?" said Mr. Bates, as he passed. He did not even consider it worth his while to raise his hat. Emmeline passed on. She reflected that if a grown-up young man could know what a girl of fourteen really thought of him, he perhaps would not swing his umbrella quite so airily.

Then she saw old Mr. Henry T. Meredith, who was eighty and had had three wives, approaching. Emmeline shuddered at the thought that the southernwood might point to him. Mr. Meredith was fond of little girls, and he was perpetually mistaking a little girl for one of his own descendants. He had grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and his memory had begun to fail. He stopped and rested on his stick when he met Emmeline, and felt in his overcoat pocket, from which he drew a sticky molasses drop. Then he thrust the sweet into Emmeline's mouth with a loud cackle of intense enjoyment.

"Didn't think ye was goin' to meet grandpa, did ye?" said he. "How be ye, grandpa's little Lizzie? How's your ma?"

Emmeline's disgust and indignation struggled with her native politeness and veneration for age. She spoke as well as she could on account



Digitized by Google

of the sticky sweetmeat in her mouth. "I am not Lizzie," said she. "You have made a mistake, Mr. Meredith. I am Emmeline Ames."

It was all thrown away on Mr. Meredith. He did not hear one word. He thrust another molasses drop into Emmeline's hand, and he cackled again. "Here's another for ye," said he. "Now run right home to your ma, Lizzie, or you'll ketch cold."

Old Mr. Meredith went his way and Emmeline went hers. As soon as she was quite sure she was unobserved she disposed of the two molasses drops. This time the irony of fate had almost cuffed her ears.

She walked on a little farther. She had almost given up when she saw the Boy advancing. This time she *knew*. When they met she glanced quickly at him, disclosing a flash of brilliant blue under gold-fringed lids which immediately dropped upon paling cheeks. She was *sure* the Boy's eyes had met hers, but he did not look away so quickly. She could feel his earnest gaze upon her face. She knew that he turned and looked after her. She wondered if she were walking straight. She felt the boy's love in her shoe. Her heart beat so loud that she did not hear the resonant creak of the snow.



Digitized by Google

She did not feel the bite of the winter wind upon her face. A sleigh passed with a loud jangle of bells. She did not notice it. She had met the Boy. She had no doubt. She did not know who he was. He was a beautiful boy. He was tall and straight and slender, and he had a handsome dark face. Emmeline had met him with a sprig of southernwood in her shoe, and she *knew*. It made no difference to her that the superstition was to the effect that a girl would marry the *first* one whom she met. She obviously could not marry a boy who was the property of her dearest friend, or an engaged young man, or an old gentleman who could not tell her from one of his own great-grandchildren.

In her agitation, Emmeline walked nearly a quarter of a mile past the store. Then she met Anita, who asked her where she was going, and she remembered.

"To the store?" repeated Anita. "Why, Emmeline Ames, you have walked 'way past it! It is freezing cold, too."

Anita was very fat, and there was a curious unfinished effect about her nose and mouth. She had a quantity of black hair, and she had just begun to do it up. A great knot of it wobbled about her neck as she spoke.



Digitized by Google

"I don't feel a bit cold," replied Emmeline.

"It is cold — the coldest day of the year. Well, turn round and walk back with me. I am going to the store, too. Aunt Rachel wants some knitting-cotton—she is out of it—for those everlasting face-cloths she is always knitting."

"I suppose she likes to knit them," Emmeline remarked, dreamily, as she walked back with Anita.

"I suppose she does, or she knits them because she hasn't anything she *does* like to do."

Emmeline did not hear what Anita said. She was thinking of the Boy. Then suddenly she thought she must say something to her friend. "I met Johnny just now," she said.

The color flew into Anita's face. She tossed her head, and the great knot of black hair wobbled dangerously.

"Huh!" said she, "I don't know as I think so very much of Johnny Woodfield, after all."

"But, Anita," Emmeline said, wonderingly, "you remember how you met him last summer when you had that sprig of boy's-love in your shoe."

"Huh!" said Anita, quite violently, "I don't know as I have much faith in that sign,



Digitized by Google

anyway. Johnny Woodfield isn't the only boy in this town, and I don't waste my thoughts on any boy myself. I am going to begin to study French with Miss Laselle next week. Grandmother says perhaps I can go to Europe for a year after I am through the high-school, and if I can't speak French nobody can understand a word I say. I might just as well be a cat travelling!"

Emmeline stared at Anita.

"Grandmother says she thinks I shall need a year's rest before I go to college," said Anita, proudly. "I am not very strong."

Emmeline, little, slender, high-browed girl, looked at her with surprise. "Why, Anita, you look real strong!" said she.

"I know I weigh more than you do, Emmeline," Anita returned, severely, "but weight does not always mean health. I am *very* delicate."

Then they entered the store. Emmeline made her purchases, and Anita bought white knitting-cotton. Then she and Anita said good-bye to each other and parted. Emmeline walked home through the deepening winter twilight. She gazed ahead with her innocent, serious blue eyes. She had a listening air, as if she heard music. She was very happy.



Digitized by Google

When she reached home she went into the sitting-room, where her mother and Aunt Martha and the children and her little dog Spotty were all grouped before the hearth fire. Spotty sprang at her, yelping with delight. He tried to reach her beloved little face with his affectionate, quivering tongue.

"Have you almost perished with the cold, dear?" asked Emmeline's mother.

"I am not a bit cold," replied Emmeline.

She removed her wraps, and sat down with the others before the fire, which cast a strange crimson glow upon her head. Emmeline sat still, smiling a strange, inscrutable smile. Her eyes, very blue and bright, seemed gazing within herself into long vistas of joy. Little Sally was fast asleep on the bearskin rug. The firelight was playing over her, and she also was smiling, in her sleep, with ineffable mystery. The baby in Aunt Martha's arms laughed and crowed, and held out little imploring arms to Emmeline, who immediately arose and took her carefully, with tender kisses. The baby cuddled up against her shoulder when she sat down again, and Emmeline smiled over the little head, that same smile of inscrutable joy.

Mr. John Adams, Aunt Martha's husband,



Digitized by Google

came in. "Whew! but it is a cold night! It seems mighty good to get home," he said. He kissed Martha, and patted the children's and Emmeline's heads.

Then Annie came to the door and said that dinner was ready. After dinner Emmeline read a little while, then went to bed. When she had left the room after her good-night kisses, Mr. John Adams looked across his evening paper at his wife and sister-in-law.

"That girl is going to make havoc with young men's hearts before very long," said he.

"She is growing prettier every day," assented Martha.

Mrs. Ames smiled proudly but a little uneasily. "Don't put such ideas into the child's head, John," she said.

"There is no need of putting in things which are there already," said John, shrewdly. Then the door-bell rang, and he had to go into another room to see a man on business.

Mrs. Ames regarded her sister with a troubled expression. "You don't think that *baby* has begun to even think of such things?" she said, piteously.

"Of course not, dear," replied Martha. "It is only John's nonsense."



Digitized by Google

"She always tells me everything," said Mrs. Ames, looking somewhat consoled, "and I have never allowed her to read novels."

"I think you have been very wise about that," said Martha. "I don't mean that Sally and Rosamond shall read a page of a novel before they are eighteen."

Neither woman dreamed how the girl in her dainty nest overhead was lying awake and reading that novel of her own heart, which the most loving and watchful of guardians cannot close from the eyes of youth. Emmeline, curled up in her little white bed, was thinking of the Boy. An innocent rapture permeated every nerve when his face came before her mental vision. Such a beautiful boy, and she had not a doubt about the linking of his future with her own.

The next morning, when she woke, her first thought was of the Boy, and a great ecstasy followed the thought. She looked at her window and saw the snow drifting past it like a white veil. If it had been pleasant she might have gone to the post-office for the morning mail and she might have met the Boy; now Sydney would go. However, she was not troubled; the thought of the Boy was enough to fill her with strange content.



Digitized by Google

She was very happy all day. She sat beside a window, looking out often at the white storm. She had some embroidery in her lap, but she did not work much. She watched the snow fall and thought of the Boy. It was a very severe storm. The wind blew and the snow drifted in the yard with curling crests like waves. The trees stood as if knee-deep in eddying hollows of snow. It was strange, but the fiercer the storm became the greater became the spiritual exaltation of the little girl with first love blossoming in her heart. The storm and her happiness increased by a similar ratio. She would not have been as happy on a day when the weather was commonplace. She hardly spoke from morning until night. She had never, in all her life, been so happy. Even the baby's crying when the light began to wane did not disturb her. The baby was cutting teeth. Usually Emmeline was troubled when the baby, of whom she was very fond, cried. Now cutting teeth seemed a part of the universal joyous scheme of things. Emmeline took the baby, and danced her up and down and comforted her. When the child finally fell asleep on her shoulder the sleep also seemed a part of joy.



Digitized by Google

The storm continued all night and during the next day until noon. Then the sky cleared and the world was a great blue dazzle, sparkling as if with diamonds.

Emmeline watched the men clearing the road and Sydney heaping up the snow in great ridges on either side of the front walk. She did not go out that day, and missed more chances of seeing the Boy; still, the thought of him was entirely sufficient to content her.

The thought of him was sufficient to content her as days and weeks and months passed and she did not see him again. She was even curiously afraid that somebody might mention him to her and she might discover who he was. She felt instinctively that any mention of the Boy might disturb the beautiful crystalline isolation in which she dwelt with him.

The winter was over, then the spring school term when Emmeline graduated at the village high-school, then the long summer vacation began. All this time Emmeline was very happy with her remembrance and her dream and her blossoming hopes, although she never saw the Boy. She grew taller, and people said she was fast becoming a beauty. Emmeline herself did not realize any difference. She had



Digitized by Google

always considered herself pretty, and loved, very innocently, her face in her looking-glass. She lived so in her dream that she could not realize what changes the dream was working within herself.

Toward twilight one summer day Emmeline started to spend the night at Anita Lord's. Anita was to have a little party, and Emmeline was invited to remain all night with her. Emmeline wore her new white dress trimmed with lace and embroidery, and a white hat trimmed with white ribbon and roses. She carried a bag containing her nightgown and toilet things.

She walked fast, for there was a cloud in the northwest which might mean a thunder-shower, the light was waning fast, and she wanted to reach Anita's house. She had come to an unsettled place bordered by fields when she heard a hoarse, drunken shout behind her which filled her with panic. She ran, but as she ran she glanced back. She saw a huge figure coming after her at a staggering run. She knew immediately who it was—Mr. Ticknor. He shouted again, and she understood. "Violetty! Violetty!" shouted Mr. Ticknor. Emmeline knew that he was mistaking her for his daughter Violetta.



Digitized by Google

She had heard a great deal about Mr. Ticknor's brutal treatment of his family. She reflected that since Mr. Ticknor mistook her for his daughter Violetta he might, if he caught her, be brutal to her. She ran on. The hoarse shouts gained in intensity. She heard the name of Violetta coupled with alarming threats. She made out that she was to be beaten within an inch of her life. Her slim legs skimmed the ground as lightly as a bird's, but, alas! Mr. Ticknor could cover twice as much at a jump as she. He would certainly have caught her had it not been for his frequent departures from a straight course. As it was, Emmeline heard the heavy, padding footsteps nearer and nearer. She saw at a quick glance what might be her only chance. She had reached the field in which stood the little corn-house where she had fastened Spotty four years ago.

She turned abruptly, and made for the little structure. She flashed through the ranks of fodder-corn like a frightened bird. She heard a louder shout of rage from Mr. Ticknor. She did not look around. She wondered, as she ran, if she remembered correctly that, besides the wooden bolt on the outside of the corn-house door, there was a lock and key. If she



Digitized by Google

were mistaken, and it was a padlock to be fastened only from the outside, she was lost. She hoped that she remembered rightly and that there was a lock, although it was unusual in such a place. When she reached the corn-house she saw that it had an old house-door which was equipped with a heavy lock and key. Emmeline dashed in. She slammed the door. She laid her hand on the key which was in the lock.

There was a moment of breathless agony; the key turned very hard. But at last it clicked, and Emmeline sank down on the dusty floor. She realized that she was faint. There was a singing in her ears, but through the singing she heard Mr. Ticknor's raging voice. Then suddenly it ceased. After a while Emmeline got strength enough to rise and stand on tiptoe and push the little sliding window a crack aside. No one was in sight. She tried to turn the key back, but she could not move it at all. It was hampered. Then she knew that she was a prisoner in the corn-house until some chance rescuer should arrive. The one window was high in the wall, and too small for even a girl of Emmeline's proportions to crawl through. Emmeline tugged again at the key. She



Digitized by Google

blistered one hand, but it was all useless. Then she stood on tiptoe again and peeped out of the window. Presently a buggy drawn by a white horse passed, and she did make a dismal little outcry, but the buggy rattled rapidly past. Emmeline sat down on a pile of last year's corn. She did not weep. The situation was beyond tears.

She could not sit still long. She was at the window again. She saw in the dim light a figure pass along the road. Then she realized that she could not possibly know who it was, that she might be rushing from one danger to another. She realized that she must remain where she was all night!—that she must make up her mind to it. She thought of the party at Anita's. She knew that her relatives would have no occasion to worry because she did not come home; that Anita would only think that something had detained her, and would not worry, either; that nobody would institute a search for her until the next day. Then she heard a familiar little sound which revived her. It was Spotty's small, far-reaching bark. The little dog came across the field like a flying shadow. First he leaped at the window, which he could not reach. He whined, he called



Digitized by Google

his consternation, his sympathy, with all the tones in his faithful dog-voice. All night long he barked and howled at intervals. If it had not been for Spotty, Emmeline considered that she could never have endured such a night. The little dog's scratchings on the door and his commiserating cries were all she had to sustain her. She sat miserably on the pile of corn, and waited for morning. She soon realized that there were mice, if not rats, in the corn-house. She had frequently to move about to keep them quiet.

Finally the sun rose. Then she took up her station at the window. People began to pass, on the road, walking and driving. Emmeline, whenever she thought she was safe in so doing, cried out, but her voice did not carry well and nobody heard her. Spotty also made frantic dashes at everybody, but he was simply shooed away. Nobody understood his dog-language. It was ten o'clock before help came. Emmeline saw a slim, straight young figure swinging along the road. Spotty made one of his desperate dashes. The figure stopped. Then Emmeline saw the dog, mad with joy, careering back to her prison, and running in his wake the Boy, When the Boy reached the corn-



Digitized by Google

house he saw, in a little window high in the wall, a beautiful little pale face fluffed around with yellow hair against a background of amber dusk.

"What *is* the matter?" said the Boy.

Emmeline explained in little gasps as well as she was able. The Boy immediately rose to the situation. He was a strong Boy. He put knee and shoulder against the corn-house door and Emmeline was free. "You poor little soul!" said the Boy. Emmeline was so weak she could hardly stand. "Here, take my arm," said the Boy. He was not at all awkward with a girl, although he was a boy. Emmeline took his arm, and the two went through the corn, every blade of which was strung with a row of dewdrops, like a lily-of-the-valley, and Spotty raced ahead with joyous yelps, and returned to circle with leaping bounds around the two. "That's a nice little dog," said the Boy, when a lull in the explanations of the situation came.

"Yes," said Emmeline. "I don't know how I could ever have lived through the night if it hadn't been for Spotty."

"Poor little soul!" said the Boy, again.

Emmeline felt a thrill of something which seemed like the light of the dewy morning.



Digitized by Google

"I don't know what your name is," said the Boy.

"Emmeline Ames. I don't know what your name is, either."

"My name is Guy Russell. I am Mrs. Elizabeth Russell's nephew. My father and mother died when I was a baby. When I haven't been at school I have lived with my aunt Edith, but she died last winter, and now I suppose I shall be here with Aunt Elizabeth a good deal. I enter Yale next fall, and next summer I am going abroad."

Emmeline felt a sinking at her heart.

"Are you?" she said.

"Yes. I shall only be gone six weeks. I shall be here with Aunt Elizabeth the rest of the time when I am not at college. I am to stay here the rest of this summer."

"I am sorry your aunt Edith died," said Emmeline.

"She was just like a mother to me," said the Boy, simply.

Emmeline felt very sorry for him. It seemed to her that she had never felt so sorry for any one before. She gave the Boy's arm the most delicate little pressure with her hand, and he immediately pressed the arm closer against his side.



Digitized by Google

"But Aunt Elizabeth is all right," said the Boy. "Do you know her?"

"By sight," replied Emmeline, and she spoke with a little awe. Mrs. Elizabeth Russell was a very wealthy woman, the only really wealthy woman in the village. She lived in a most beautiful house. She had travelled. She had wonderful guests from cities during the summer. She mingled very little with the village people. She was popularly supposed to be very proud, although she was said to be charitable, and very pleasant "when you knew her." She had once called on Emmeline's mother, and Mrs. Ames, very particularly dressed, had returned the call, but that was when Emmeline was very young. She had only seen Mrs. Russell across the church or driving, but she had always regarded her with a sort of feudal admiration. "I think your aunt Elizabeth is beautiful," she said, warmly.

"Yes, she is," assented the Boy.

Then they had reached Emmeline's house, and Emmeline was trembling with irresolution as to whether she ought or ought not to invite the Boy in. Her mother and Aunt Martha solved the question by rushing out with exclamations and questions. They had just



Digitized by Google

heard that Emmeline had not been at Anita's party, and Mr. John Adams was even then on another road with some men searching for her.

While Mrs. Ames and Aunt Martha hugged Emmeline and exclaimed over her, she and the Boy, between them, told the story. Then Emmeline and the Boy were in the house at the breakfast-table. It seemed that, although the Boy had already eaten one breakfast, there was something about Annie's waffles and coffee and omelette which surpassed his aunt's French cook's efforts. Emmeline was blissfully watchful of the Boy while he ate. She herself ate, but did not seem to taste anything except what the Boy ate.

"I wonder the dear child looks so well after such an awful night," Aunt Martha said to Emmeline's mother.

Mrs. Ames looked happily at Emmeline's pink cheeks and the blue delight of her eyes. "I wonder she isn't down sick," said she. The two women looked approvingly at young Guy Russell. After he had gone, and Emmeline had been put to bed, they agreed that he looked as if he might grow to be a splendid man.

"I suppose he will have all his aunt's money,



Digitized by Google

too," said Mrs. Ames. Then she looked ashamed of herself. "But that is nothing compared with his being such a good, honest, innocent boy," she said.

"His aunt Edith Sloan was a splendid woman, from everything I have heard of her. It is easy to see that the boy has been brought up by a good woman. He shows it." Mrs. Ames had a dreamy look in her eyes. Her sister smiled a little furtive smile.

They both thought Emmeline, up-stairs in her little room, was asleep, but she was not. She was too happy to sleep. She was one of the very few on the face of this earth who dream and keep the precious crystal of the dream unshattered by the shock with reality.

It was a week after that that Mrs. Elizabeth Russell gave a party for her nephew, and Emmeline was invited. Mrs. Russell sent her carriage for her. Emmeline had her first silk dress to wear. It was made over from one her mother had worn when a girl. It was white silk sprinkled with little silver dots. Emmeline's hair was tied with a great white bow, and she had white shoes, and she looked, her mother and aunt thought, the prettiest thing in the world. "I am glad the dear child doesn't



Digitized by Google

know what a beauty she is," said Mrs. Ames, after the carriage had rolled away.

"She hasn't an idea," said Martha.

Neither dreamed that Emmeline knew perfectly well how she looked, and that an innocent rapture because of her beauty in her silver-dotted gown seemed to perfume her very soul. It is more beautiful than beauty itself to be innocently conscious of it, and to value it more for the sake of the love of another than for self-love. Emmeline reflected how pleased the Boy would be with her appearance and she tasted that pleasure instead of her own, exactly as she had tasted the breakfast the morning after he had rescued her from her prison.

There was a palm-room in Mrs. Elizabeth Russell's house. An hour later Emmeline and the Boy were in there. They stood under some great spreading fronds and looked out of a wide window at a wonderful sight. The lawn was all dotted with swinging Japanese lanterns, and electric lights made strange shadows which seemed alive. The night looked like another world, full of mysteries of beauty unfolding upon beauty, and joy upon joy. Each saw more than there really was, because each saw with the other's eyes. They looked out at



Digitized by Google

the fairy night, then they looked at each other.

"You are the most beautiful girl I ever saw in my whole life," said the Boy, with blunt fervor. He spoke as if he had lived ages. The girl made no disclaimer. She believed him. She gazed back at him with radiant delight in his appreciation of her.

The window opened like a door. The Boy threw it wide, and took Emmeline's hand with a caressing touch in his hard, boyish one. "Let's walk out there," he said, stammeringly. He and Emmeline went out. They strolled arm in arm along a broad gravel walk, and finally sat down under a tree swarming with brilliant lanterns like butterflies. They were quite alone. Most of the guests were on the other side of the lawn, where refreshments were being served, and where the orchestra played behind some flowering bushes. The Boy put his arm around the girl. "I love you," he whispered. Emmeline said nothing. She felt as if some divine fluid were coursing through all her veins.

"Don't you love me?" said the Boy.

"Yes," replied Emmeline.

She and the Boy kissed each other.

"Then we are engaged," said the Boy.



996417A

Digitized by Google

Emmeline nodded. She looked at him, and her face of love, and ignorance of love, was fairly dazzling. The Boy kissed her again. Then they sat still. The Boy's arm was around the girl and her head on his shoulder. Both tasted the uttermost joy of the present. Happiness stood still in their heaven.

Digitized by Google

# BILLY AND SUSY

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# BILLY AND SUSY

FOR years the sisters, Miss Melissa Abbot and Mrs. Sarah Drew, had lived in peace and concord, not in the same house, but in adjoining ones. Mrs. Drew had married when very young, and her husband had lived only a year. At that time the old Abbot homestead had been filled with unmarried sons and daughters, and the young widow had continued to reside in the pretty little cottage which her husband had built for her. Now Miss Melissa had been living alone for some years, and so had Mrs. Drew, and people wondered why they did not keep house together, but both were women of habit, and did not relish any change. Moreover, the two houses, the square old homestead and the little cottage with its piazza under the overhang of the roof, were so near that the sisters could talk from open windows. They



Digitized by Google

were devoted to each other; in fact, they were considered an example of sisterly affection for the whole village, until they were both old women and the advent of Billy and Susy. Billy and Susy were two remarkably pretty yellow kittens; young Mira Holmes had brought them over one afternoon in May, in a covered basket. She stopped at Mrs. Drew's. Miss Melissa was spending the afternoon there. She could see both elderly heads at the sitting-room windows. She knocked, and then ran in. She was quite at home there. She kissed both sisters, then she opened the basket, and two little yellow balls of fur flew out. "Our cat had five," said Mira, "and they were so pretty we could not bear to have them drowned. So we thought maybe you would like these. Nellie Stowe has two, and we are going to keep one ourselves. Would you like them?" Mira Holmes was a very pretty, slight girl, and she had a wistful, affectionate way of speaking, and a little pathetic expression. Mira had been as good as engaged to Harry Ayres, but he had ceased to visit her some six months before. Mira went her way patiently, but she was thinner, and pathetic, in spite of everything. She laughed with the old ladies when the yellow



Digitized by Google

kittens flew out of the basket, but the laugh was as sad as a sob. The sisters were enthusiastic over the gift.

"It was only yesterday that sister and I were saying that we really must have some cats; we are both overrun with mice," declared Mrs. Sarah Drew, and she appropriated directly one of the kittens, and folded it under her soft double chin. "I will call him Billy, after the cat I had when I first came to live here," said she. "That was a yellow cat, too."

Miss Melissa gathered up the other kitten lovingly. "I will call her Susy," she announced. "You remember I had a yellow cat named Susy, once, sister?"

Mira did not remain very long. She went her way with her empty basket on her arm. As she went out of the yard between the bridal-wreath bushes, and the flowering almond, and the striped grass, her head drooped wearily under her spring hat trimmed with rosebuds.

"Poor little thing!" said Mrs. Drew, pityingly.

Miss Melissa tossed her head. "Good land!" said she. "I guess she will get another beau, a girl as pretty as Mira Holmes, and if she doesn't it is no matter; beaux are not everything in the world. Girls are silly."



Digitized by Google

Then Miss Melissa turned toward her yellow kitten, but both sisters had put the kittens on the floor when they bade farewell to Mira, and now came disaster: their first quarrel. Miss Melissa gathered up a kitten lovingly, but Mrs. Drew interposed. "Stop, Melissa," said she; "that is my kitten, that is my yellow kitten, that is Billy."

"Why, Sarah Drew," cried Miss Melissa, "you know better! You know this is Susy."

Mrs. Drew caught up the other yellow kitten, and both sisters glared over the little, soft, yellow, wriggling things. "This is Susy," declared Melissa.

"This is Susy. You have got my cat," insisted Sarah.

The kittens were exactly alike to the ordinary observer, but not to the sisters. "I know I have my Susy," said Melissa. "I noticed particularly her expression."

"Cat's hind leg!" said Sarah, contemptuously. It was a sarcastic expletive peculiar to her herself, and in this case more appropriate than usual. "Talk about a cat having expression," she added. Then she laughed a disagreeable laugh. Sarah had a temper.

Miss Melissa also had a temper, but hers was



Digitized by Google

"THIS IS SUSY. YOU HAVE GOT MY CAT," INSISTED SARAH

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

of the tearful variety. Tears streamed over her faded blond cheeks — tears of rage and hurt sentiment. "Cats have expression," she declared, in a hysterical voice. "You can talk all you want. My Susy had the most innocent expression, and this one looks just like her. Precious little Susy cat!" she crooned to the yellow kitten.

"Susy nothing," said Sarah. "That cat is my Billy, and this is your precious Susy. I wouldn't have this kind of a cat, anyway. They keep you always drowning kittens or trying to give them away. Give me Billy!"

"You have got Billy now," said Miss Melissa, tearfully. "Precious little Susy cat!"

"That cat you *have is Billy*," said Sarah Drew, with awful firmness.

"You have Billy, and this precious is Susy," returned Melissa, with more sentiment but equal obstinacy.

Neither would yield. Melissa, grasping the yellow cat which she claimed so tightly that it clawed and mewed, went home. Sarah Drew thrust the remaining cat viciously into the kitchen. "Here, Abby," she said to the old woman who had worked for her ever since her



Digitized by Google

marriage, "take this miserable cat! Miss Mira brought it, but I don't want it."

Abby had heard every word of the discussion. She always heard: she considered it her duty. She gathered up the kitten, and presently she came to the sitting-room door.

"Miss Sarah," said she.

"I don't want to hear a word," replied Sarah, shortly and haughtily.

"But—"

"I don't want to hear a word. I know you were listening, and you always take everybody's part against me. Now, you can either keep that miserable cat in the kitchen or drown it, I don't care which, but if you do keep it, you must dispose of the kittens. Now, I don't want to hear another word."

Abby, who was as tall and angular as a man, went out.

Later in the afternoon she and Miss Melissa's girl, who was also an old woman, had a conference out in the garden, over the fence. Each held a yellow kitten. They parted after a while, because Mrs. Drew was seen standing in the kitchen door watching them. But Maria, Miss Melissa's maid, said, in a whisper, "Both



Digitized by Google

of them were always awful set," and Abby nodded assent.

Neither of the women was a gossip. It was nearly a month before it leaked out that Melissa Abbot and Sarah Drew had had a quarrel and were not on speaking terms. The two led a sad life. Melissa got no comfort from fondling her yellow cat, which grew in size and beauty. Abby kept the other carefully from her mistress' sight, and tried to cook things to tempt her appetite. Both sisters were very unhappy. They had always been of a sociable disposition, and each was afraid to accept an invitation lest she should meet her sister. They stayed at home and moped. The curtains were drawn over the opposite windows in the cottage and homestead. Mrs. Drew was constantly on the alert, and never stirred out-of-doors unless she was quite sure that her sister was at home and there was no danger of meeting her upon the street. Each became afraid of venturing abroad unless the other was housed. Sarah Drew watched. Melissa Abbot watched. Each knew that the other watched. Each knew the other so well that she could judge exactly of her sister's state of mind from her own. Thus each suffered doubly.



Digitized by Google

Mira Holmes heard of the estrangement, and came to see Mrs. Drew about it. "I am so sorry," said she, and the tears, always in her heart for her own trouble, welled into her patient blue eyes.

"It is nothing you are to blame for, child," replied Sarah Drew with dignity. Both sisters were too proud to say anything to each other's detriment. "It is unfortunate that the cats looked *so* much alike, but I can't see how you are responsible for that."

"Maybe not," admitted Mira. Then she broke down, and wept. "I am so sorry to have been the means of parting two sisters like you," she sobbed. Her own grief stung her afresh as she wept for that of the sisters.

"You didn't part us," replied Sarah Drew. "It was two yellow cats that looked exactly alike." She called to Abby to make some tea and cut some sponge-cake. When the tea and cake arrived she served them as calmly as if there were no yellow cats of confused identity in the world. "Drink this tea and eat some cake," said she. "There is no sense in making yourself sick. This is a personal matter between my sister and myself."



Digitized by Google

"I wish they didn't look so much alike," sobbed Mira, trying to sip the tea.

"I can't see how you are to blame for that," Sarah Drew said again.

"If I had only brought one tiger cat and one yellow! There were two lovely tigers that I gave Nellie Stowe," said Mira, pitifully.

"I never liked tiger cats; I prefer yellow cats, but not one of this kind," said Sarah Drew. Then she changed the subject. "It is a beautiful day," said she, "though it is pretty warm for so early in the season." She talked at length about the weather, and how the apple-trees were blooming, then she talked about the fair which the ladies of the Mission Circle were to give. Whenever poor young Mira Holmes essayed to bring up the subject of the yellow cats, Sarah gently, but firmly, swerved her aside.

When Mira left, she went to make a call upon Melissa, but her call was just as devoid of good results. Miss Melissa was much more reserved than her sister upon the subject. She even refused to justify herself in her conduct. The only thing she did was to call Maria and ask her to take Susy out of the room. The kitten had been curled up in a little coil of yellow fur upon the sofa when Mira entered. Poor Mira



Digitized by Google

had to drink another cup of tea, and eat more sponge-cake made from the identical recipe of the other; then she went home. On her way home she met Harry Ayres, the young man to whom she had been engaged, and he hardly noticed her, simply raising his hat without a smile, as if she had been a stranger. Mira scarcely inclined her pretty head. When she reached home, however, she found a certain comfort in throwing herself openly into a chair and weeping, and sobbing out to her mother how badly she felt about Mrs. Drew and Miss Melissa and the two yellow cats. She had felt obliged to conceal her tears heretofore from her mother. Now it was a comfort to weep before her for something for which she need not be ashamed, and at the same time weep for her own private misery.

If Mira's mother knew that the girl was weeping for something besides the complication of the cats, she did not show it. She was a very gentle, soft-voiced woman, with beautiful rippling folds of yellow hair over her ears. She stroked Mira's head. "Don't, dear," said she. "You are not to blame."

"I thought they would—like the—cats," sobbed Mira.



Digitized by Google

"Of course you did, dear. Don't feel so. I will go over and see them myself to-morrow afternoon. I have an errand about the fair, and I will see if I can't do something."

"Miss Melissa may be mistaken, and Mrs. Drew may be mistaken; nobody knows," said Mira.

"If they are, it will be very hard for them to give in," said Mrs. Holmes. "They are nice women, but they were always very set. They were when I used to go to school with them. But I will see what I can do."

It ended in Mrs. Holmes drinking tea and eating sponge-cake in both houses, and coming away exactly as Mira had done. It ended in the same way for many others. Many good women called, and drank tea and ate sponge-cake and tried to make peace between the sisters, and came away realizing that their effort had been fruitless. Even the minister's wife drank tea and ate sponge-cake, and the minister himself drank, and ate, and offered prayer in vain. After his call the sisters did not attend church at all. Previously they had gone to church, but had sat in different pews, leaving the old Abbot pew quite unoccupied. Both Miss Melissa and Mrs. Drew, on the Sunday



Digitized by Google

after the minister's call, watched with secret pride and approved each other's staying at home from church. Although at bitter enmity with her, each sister felt that she should have been personally mortified had she seen the other emerge from her front door, clad in her Sabbath best, after the minister's call and his direct importunities at the throne of grace that they of the Abbot family should see the error of their ways.

Miss Melissa caressed her yellow cat, and said, aloud: "Well, I am glad she has some pride, if she hasn't anything else"; and Mrs. Drew told Abby, after the church bell had done ringing, if she had made up her mind to keep that miserable cat, to be sure it had plenty of milk and no meat until it was older, for fear of fits, and added that if she had to keep animals that belonged to other folks she did not want them neglected under her roof anyway.

That Sunday there was almost a rift in the cloud of dissension between the sisters, a rift based upon common pride and resentment of interference: an unworthy rift of unnatural sunlight of forgiveness caused by anger against another. But it did not last. By the next Sunday, neither expecting the other to go to



Digitized by Google

church, each realized a complete return of the old bitterness. And the bitterness, as the days and weeks went on, caused more and more unhappiness. The two old women were fighting with two-edged swords, which they who love and fight must always use, and every time one inflicted a wound upon the other she hurt herself. People began to say that the sisters were aging terribly. Finally the doctor was seen stopping every day at both houses, then the news was spread abroad that the sisters had been told that they must have a change of scene. They were not wealthy enough to have a change of scene, unless it took the form of a visit. Then Miss Melissa went to pay her married brother, Thomas Abbot, who lived in Springfield, a visit, and Mrs. Drew went to pay her married sister Eliza, who lived in New York State, a visit, and Abby and Maria took care of their houses and the two yellow cats. Now and then they had letters from the sisters, which stated that they were improving in health, but one day the two old servants, knee-deep in catnip and with their skirts catching in a tangle of sweetbrier, talking over the back fence, agreed that their mistresses did not write as if they were happy.



Digitized by Google

"I know Mis' Drew," said Abby. "She can set up as stiff as she's a mind to, but she can't cheat me. She'll never be herself ag'in till she and her sister make up. When two women have lived as many years as they have, and thought so much of each other, it's goin' to take somethin' more'n a quarrel over two yeller cats to make them live this way and be jest as chipper as if nothin' had happened."

"I know Miss Melissa never will be the same," said Maria. "She's tried to make out as if she set the earth by that cat, but I've seen her look as if she'd like to pitch it out of the winder."

"It's a pity they wouldn't neither of them let us tell them," said Abby.

"Well, they wouldn't. The minute I begun to speak I was hushed up, and so was you," said Maria.

"Yes, that's so," said Abby. "Guess I'll take in some of this catnip for the cat. It won't last much longer, and I guess I'll dry some."

"I guess I will, too," said Maria. "It looks something like frost to-night."

"There won't be a frost unless the wind goes down," returned Abby. Her gray hair



Digitized by Google

whipped about her face as she picked a great bunch of catnip.

"It does blow. When do you expect *her* home?"

"She hasn't said anything about coming. I shouldn't wonder if she didn't come before Thanksgiving. When do you expect *her?*"

"I don't know any more than you do. Good land! It will be a queer Thanksgiving if they don't make up first!"

"Maybe they will."

"They're awful set, both of them."

"Well," said Abby, "they may hate each other like poison for the rest of their natural lives. They may be set about that, but there's some things they can't be set about, nohow."

Both women laughed as they parted, and went their ways with bundles of catnip.

It was a week before Thanksgiving when Miss Melissa came home, and Mrs. Drew arrived the next day. It was four o'clock in the afternoon when Melissa, with her white hood over her head, muffled against the bitter wind in her soft gray shawl, entered the south door, just as she had been accustomed to do. "So you've got home, Sarah?" said she. She was pale and red



Digitized by Google

by turns. She looked afraid and troubled, and yet as if she wanted to laugh. Mrs. Drew had much the same shift of expression.

"Yes," said she. "I came on the half-past-three train. Sit down."

Melissa sat down.

"Take your things off and stay to supper. Abby's making cream-of-tartar biscuits. Did you have a pleasant visit at Thomas's?"

"Very pleasant, thank you."

"How are they all? How is Thomas's wife? Is Grace well?"

"They both seem real well. Did you have a pleasant visit at Eliza's?"

"Very pleasant, thank you."

"How is Eliza? Is Henry getting on well in his law-office, and how is Lizzie?"

"They all seem real well, and Henry is smart as a whip. Eliza has a beautiful new winter cloak."

There was a silence. Miss Melissa's face reddened and paled, then reddened. She laughed nervously. "Oh," said she, "I have something to say to you, Sarah."

"Well?"

"It's nothing, only—I feel as if I must tell you, I—was right—Billy is Susy, and she's



Digitized by Google

got five kittens. They haven't got their eyes open yet."

Mrs. Drew laughed. "Susy, is she?"

"Yes. You must have been mistaken."

"Well, I guess I was; but as for Billy's being Susy, well—" Mrs. Drew gave a long sigh. Then she laughed again, a sharp cackle of nervous mirth.

Miss Melissa stared at her. She looked relieved, but a little alarmed. "I'm glad you don't lay it up," said she, "but—"

"Just wait a minute. Abby!"

Abby opened the door.

"Bring in that basket, please, Abby," said Mrs. Drew.

Melissa looked at her sister with such curiosity that her face assumed a vacant expression. Mrs. Drew continued to laugh. Finally Melissa joined in, although unwillingly. "What in the world we are laughing at I don't see," she tittered.

"Because we've been a pair of fools," said Mrs. Drew, as Abby returned. She set down on the floor before the two old women a basket in which lay curled up a yellow mother cat luxuriously purring love to some yellow kittens.

"There are four of them," said Mrs. Drew,



Digitized by Google

"all yellow, and they have had their eyes opened some time."

Miss Melissa stared at the cat and kittens, then at her sister.

"Then—" she began.

"They were both Susy," said Mrs. Drew, "and we quarrelled over nothing at all."

"Sarah—"

"Well?"

"I had made up my mind, anyway, to come over here and ask you to forgive me, and take my Susy if you thought she was Billy."

"And I had made up my mind to go over to your house, anyway, and ask you to forgive me, and keep Billy if you thought he was Susy," said Mrs. Drew.

Then the two women laughed in chorus. "No Billy at all," said Miss Melissa, giggling like a girl.

"And two old women making themselves ridiculous, fighting over two yellow cats," said Mrs. Drew.

Out in the kitchen Abby echoed their mirth with an irrestrainable peal of laughter.

"Mira Holmes and Harry Ayres have made up and are going to be married, Abby tells me,"



Digitized by Google

said Mrs. Drew. "I mean she shall have two of those yellow kittens."

"I hate to have my Susy's drowned," said Melissa. "Maria says she thinks we can give them away. They are beautiful kittens: all yellow, just like these. Of course, you are coming over to dinner to-morrow, Sarah. Maria has the Thanksgiving cooking all done."

"I'd like to see myself doing anything else," said Mrs. Drew.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Melissa.

"What?"

"I'll send over and ask Mira and her mother and Harry to supper to-morrow night. I suppose they'll go to his folks to dinner, but maybe they'll like to come to supper. Maria has made some chicken pies."

"I think that is a real good idea," said Sarah Drew, warmly.

So it happened that Thanksgiving evening the old Abbot house was brightly lighted, and after supper the sisters, Mira and her mother, and Harry Ayres all sat in the best parlor in the old Abbot house, before the hearth-fire. It was so pleasant that Mira had begged not to have the lamp lighted. She wore a red gown, and the firelight played over her pretty face and over



Digitized by Google

her lover's, and the two held hands under a fold of the red gown, and trusted that nobody saw in the uncertain light.

"I thought maybe you would like to have two of the kittens when you begin housekeeping," Mrs. Drew was saying.

"That house your father has bought for you is the handsomest in the village," Miss Melissa said to Harry; "but it is old, and I never saw an old house yet where there weren't mice."

"That is true," said Mira's mother, in her soft voice.

"I think that is a grand idea, thank you, Mrs. Drew," Harry said, in his pleasant, happy, boyish voice.

"I should love to have them, thank you, Mrs. Drew," said Mira.

Neither she nor her young lover dreamed that the love in the hearts of the two old sisters struck, albeit free from all romance, a note which chorded with their own into a true harmony of thanksgiving.

Digitized by Google

# THE SELFISHNESS OF AMELIA LAMKIN

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# THE SELFISHNESS OF AMELIA LAMKIN

IT was a morning in late February. The day before there had been a storm of unusually damp, clogging snow, which had lodged upon everything in strange, shapeless masses. The trees bore big blobs of snow, caught here and there in forks or upon extremities. They looked as if the northwester had pelted them with snowballs. Below the rise of ground on which the Lamkin house stood there was a low growth of trees, and they resembled snowball-bushes in full bloom. Amelia Lamkin at her breakfast-table could see them. There were seven persons at the breakfast-table: Josiah Lamkin and his wife Amelia; Annie Sears, the eldest daughter, who was married and lived at home; Addie Lamkin, the second daughter, a



Digitized by Google

pretty girl of eighteen; Tommy Lamkin, aged thirteen; little Johnny Field, a child of four, an orphan grandchild of Amelia Lamkin; and Jane Strong, Amelia's unmarried sister, who was visiting her. Annie Sears was eating, with dainty little bites, toast and eggs prepared in a particular way. She was delicate, and careful about her diet. The one maid in the household was not trusted to prepare Annie's eggs. Amelia did that. She was obliged to rise early in any case. Harry Sears, Annie's husband, left for the city at seven o'clock, and he was also particular about his eggs, although he was not delicate. Addie loathed eggs in any form except an omelet, and Hannah, the maid, could not achieve one. Therefore, Amelia cooked Addie's nice, fluffy omelet. Tommy was not particular about quality, but about quantity, and Amelia had that very much upon her mind. Johnny's rice was cooked in a special way which Hannah had not mastered, and Amelia prepared that. Josiah liked porterhouse beefsteak broiled to an exact degree of rareness, and Hannah could not be trusted with that. Hannah's coffee was always muddy, and the Lamkins detested muddy coffee; therefore, Amelia made the coffee.



Digitized by Google

Hannah's morning duties resolved themselves into standing heavily about, resting her weight first upon one large flat foot, then upon the other, while her mistress prepared breakfast, then waiting upon the table in an absent, desultory fashion. There was a theory in the Lamkin household that poor Hannah worked very hard, since she was the only maid in a family of seven. The neighbors also acquiesced in that opinion, and Hannah herself felt pleasantly and comfortably injured. Nobody pitied Amelia Lamkin, least of all her own family. She had always waited upon them and obliterated herself to that extent that she seemed scarcely to have a foothold at all upon the earth, but to balance timidly upon the extreme edge of existence. Now and then Amelia's unmarried sister, Jane Strong, visited the Lamkins, and always expressed her unsolicited opinion. The Lamkins were justly incensed, and even Amelia herself bristled her soft plumage of indignation. She would say privately to her sister that she realized that she meant well, but she did wish that she would let her live her own way without interference; that she, Amelia, got her happiness in ways that Jane could not understand. Amelia would be quite disagreeable, and her



Digitized by Google

references to Jane's single condition would be obvious; then later, being gentle to the very core, she would beg Jane's pardon, which would be granted stiffly, without the slightest retreat from the position of attack. "Of course I don't mind a straw about what you threw out about my not being married," said Jane. "You know as well as I do that it was my own choice."

"Of course," responded Amelia, meekly, but she looked reminiscent. She was trying to remember what serious suitors Jane had really had. Jane saw the expression and understood. She was nothing if not honest.

"Land! I don't mean to say there was a line of men on their knees to marry me," she said, brusquely. "There wasn't a run as there was on that New York bank, and men hanging round from dawn till dark. Most of them got married afterward, and I guess they were pretty well satisfied, and I don't believe one of them lost a meal of victuals or a night's sleep. But you know as well as I do that there were chances I might have followed up if I wanted to."

"Yes, I know," returned Amelia, with more assurance. Really she had no doubt that if her



Digitized by Google

sister had chosen to follow up any man, even her own husband Josiah, he might have capitulated. There had always been something fascinating about Jane, and she had been and was still handsome. She was much handsomer than Amelia, although she was ten years older. Amelia was faded almost out as to color, and intense solicitude for others and perfect meekness had crossed her little face with deep lines, and bowed her slender figure like that of a patient old horse, accustomed to having his lameness ignored, and standing before doors in harness through all kinds of weather. Amelia's neck, which was long and slender, had the same curve of utter submission which one sees in the neck of a weary old beast of burden. She would slightly raise that drooping neck to expostulate with Jane. There would be a faint suggestion of ancient spirit; then it would disappear. Jane, her own chin raised splendidly, eyed her sister with a sort of tender resentment and contempt.

"Of course you know," said Jane, "that I'm enough sight better off the way I am. I'm freer than any married woman in the world. Then I've kept my looks. My figure is just as good as it ever was, and my hair's just as thick and



Digitized by Google

not a thread of gray. I suppose the time's got to come, if I live long enough, that I shall look in my glass, and see my skin yellow and flabby; but now the only change is that I'm settled *past* change. I know that means I'm not young, and some may think not as good-looking, but I *am*." Jane regarded her sister with a sort of defiance. What she said was true. Her face was quite as handsome as in her youth; all the change lay in the fact of its impregnability to the shift and play of emotions. A laugh no longer transformed her features. These reigned triumphant over mirth and joy, even grief. She was handsome, but she was not young. She was immovably Jane Strong.

"I think you are just as good-looking as you ever were," replied Amelia. As she spoke she gave a gentle sigh. Amelia, after all, was human. As a girl she had loved the soft, sweet face, suffused with bloom like an apple blossom, which she had seen in her looking-glass. She had enjoyed arranging the pretty, fair hair around it. Now that enjoyment was quite gone out of her life. The other face had been so dear and pleasant to see. She could not feel the same toward this little seamed countenance, with its shade of grayish hair over the lined



Digitized by Google

temples, and its meek, downward arc of thin lips. However, she told herself, with a little feeling of self-scorn, that she, Josiah Lamkin's wife, and mother and grandmother, could not possibly be so foolish as to regret the loss of her beauty when she could see it renewed so many-fold in the faces of her loved ones. She told herself that she was so thankful that her husband had kept his looks so well. Josiah, although older than she, was still fresh-colored and full-faced, and he had not a gray hair. Amelia knew that it would have been harder for her to see her husband's face grown old and worn in the faithful mirror of her heart than to view her own altered face in her looking-glass.

When Amelia sighed, Jane looked at her with a sort of angry pity. "You might be just as good-looking as you ever were if you had taken decent care of yourself, and not worn yourself out for other folks," said she. "There was no real need of your getting all bent over, no older than you were, and no need of your hair getting so thin and gray. You ought to have taken the time to put a tonic on it, and you ought to have stretched yourself out on the bed a good hour every afternoon, and remembered to hold your shoulders back."



Digitized by Google

"I haven't had much time to lie down every afternoon."

"You might have had if you had set others to doing what they ought, instead of doing it yourself."

Amelia bristled again, this time with more vigor. "You know," said she, "that Hannah can't cook. It isn't in her."

"I'd get a girl who could cook," returned Jane, setting her lips hard and doubling her chin in an obstinate fashion.

"I can't discharge Hannah after all the years she has been with me. She is honest and faithful."

"Faithful nothing!"

"She is faithful," said Amelia, with decision. "She is cranky, too, and I doubt if she could stay long with anybody except me. I know just how to manage her."

"She knows just how to manage you. They all do."

"Jane Strong, I won't hear you talk so about my family and poor Hannah."

"I should think it was poor Amelia."

"I have everything to be thankful for," said Amelia. "I have the best husband and children that ever a woman had, and Hannah



Digitized by Google

is just as faithful as she can be; and as for the cooking, you know I always liked to do it, Jane."

"Yes, you always liked to do everything that everybody else didn't; no doubt about that. And you always pretended you liked to eat everything that everybody else didn't."

"I have everything I want to eat."

"What did you make your breakfast of this morning?" demanded Jane.

Amelia reflected. She colored a little, then she looked defiantly at her sister. "Beefsteak, and omelet, and biscuit, and coffee," said she.

Jane sniffed. "Yes, a little scraggy bit of steak that Josiah didn't want, and that little burnt corner of Addie's omelet, and that under crust of Tommy's biscuit, and a muddy cup of watered coffee, after all the others had had two cups apiece. You needn't think I didn't see. Amelia Lamkin, you are a fool! You are killing yourself, and you are hurting your whole family and that good-for-nothing Hannah thrown in."

Then Amelia looked at Jane with sudden distress. "What do you mean, Jane?" she quavered.

"Just what I say. You are simply making



Digitized by Google

your whole family a set of pigs, and Hannah too, and you know you have an awful responsibility toward an ignorant person like that, and you are ruining your own health."

"I am very well, indeed, Jane," said Amelia, but she spoke with a slight hesitation.

"You are not well. No mortal woman who has lived her whole life on the fag ends of food and rest and happiness that nobody else had any use for can be well. You hear about dogs feeding on crumbs, and I suppose they may thrive on them, though I never saw a dog yet that didn't seem to me to get along better on bones with considerable meat sticking to them; but you don't hear about human beings living in such a fashion, and it isn't required of them. You've been doing your duty all your life so hard that you haven't given other people a chance to do theirs. You've been a very selfish woman as far as duty is concerned, Amelia Lamkin, and you have made other people selfish. If Addie marries Arthur Henderson, what kind of a wife will she make after the way you have brought her up? He's a poor man, and Addie has no more idea of waiting on herself than if she were a millionairess."

"I don't know that they have come to an



Digitized by Google

understanding yet," said Amelia, and as she spoke she blushed softly. She was as delicate over her daughter's romance as over her own.

"Oh, they will," said Jane, with a sniff, "though I don't see, for my part, what Addie Lamkin, with her looks, is in such a hurry for. I don't mean that Arthur Henderson isn't well enough, but Addie might do better when it comes to money."

"Money isn't everything."

"It is a good deal," responded Jane, sententiously, "and I guess Addie Lamkin will find it is if she marries Arthur Henderson and has to live on next to nothing a year, with everything going up the way it is now, when you have to stretch on your tiptoes and reach your arms up as if you were hanging for dear life to a strap on a universe trolley-car to keep going at all."

"Oh, I don't think they have even thought of marriage yet," said Amelia.

"*Lord!*" said Jane, with infinite scorn. After a little she continued: "I don't care. You *are* miserable. You can't hide it from me. You have lost flesh. You needn't pretend you haven't. You don't weigh nearly as much as you did when I was here last fall."

"I haven't been weighed lately."



Digitized by Google

"You don't need to get weighed. You can tell by your clothes. That gray silk dress you wore last night fairly hung on you."

"I always went up and down in my weight; you know I did, Jane."

"One of these days you will go down and never come up," retorted Jane, with grim assurance. Then Addie Lamkin, young and vigorous and instinct with beauty and health, marched into the room, and in her wake trailed Annie, sweet and dainty in a pale blue cashmere wrapper.

Addie, with her young cheeks full of roses, with her young yellow hair standing up crispy above her full temples, with her blue eyes blazing, with her red mouth pouting, opened fire. "Now, Aunt Jane," said Addie, "you know we always like to have you visit us, but Annie and I couldn't help overhearing—the door has been open all the time—and we have made up our minds to speak right out and tell you what we think. We love to have you here, don't we, Annie?"

"Yes, indeed, we love to have you, Aunt Jane," assented Annie, in her soft voice, which was very like her mother's.

Amelia made a little distressed noise.



Digitized by Google

"Don't you say a word, mother," said Addie. "We are going to say just what we think. We have made up our minds." Addie's face had the expression of one who dives. "We simply can't have you making mother miserable, Aunt Jane," said she, "and you might just as well understand. Don't you agree with me, Annie?"

"Yes," said Annie.

"Don't, dear," said Amelia.

"I must," Addie replied, firmly. "We both feel that it is our duty. We both love Aunt Jane, and we are not lacking in respect to her as to an older woman, but we must do our duty. We must speak. Aunt Jane, you simply must not interfere with mother. We will not have it."

Jane's face wore a curious expression. "How do I interfere?" asked she.

"You interfere with mother's having her own way and doing exactly what she likes," said Addie.

"And you never do?"

"No," replied Addie, "we never do. None of us do."

"No, we really don't," said Annie. She spoke apologetically. She was not as direct as Addie.



Digitized by Google

"You are quite right," said Jane Strong. "I don't think any of you ever do interfere with your mother. You let her have her own way about slaving for you and waiting upon you. Your father has, ever since he was married, and all you children have, ever since you were born; not the slightest doubt of it."

Addie looked fairly afire with righteous wrath. "Really, Aunt Jane," said she, "I don't feel that, as long as it makes mother's whole happiness to live as she does, you are called upon to hinder her."

Amelia in her turn was full of wrath. "I am sure I don't want to be hindered," said she.

"We know you don't, mother dear," said Addie, "and you shall not be."

"You need not worry," Jane said, slowly. "*I* shall not hinder your mother, but I miss my guess if she isn't hindered." Then she went out of the room, her head up, her carriage as majestic as that of a queen.

"Aunt Jane is hopping," said Addie, "but I don't care; as for having poor mother teased and made miserable every time she comes here, I won't, for one!"

"Your aunt has never had a family and she doesn't understand, dear," said Amelia. She



Digitized by Google

was a trifle bewildered by her daughter's partisanship. She was not well, and had had visions of Addie's offering to assist about luncheon. Now she realized that Addie would consider that such an offer would make her unhappy.

"No, mother dear, you shall have your own way," Annie said, caressingly. "Your own family knows what makes you happy, and you shall do just what you like." Annie put her arm around her mother's poor little waist and kissed her softly. "I am feeling wretchedly this morning," said Annie. "I think I will follow Doctor Emerson's advice to wrap myself up and sit out on the piazza an hour. I can finish that new book."

"Mind you wrap up well," Amelia said, anxiously.

"I think I will finish embroidering my silk waist," said Addie. "I want to wear it to the Simpsons' party Saturday night."

Then the daughters went away, and Amelia Lamkin went into the kitchen and prepared some scalloped fish and a cake for luncheon. She attended to some soup stock, and had consultations with the butcher and grocer. She also assisted Hannah about the breakfast dishes.



Digitized by Google

Amelia worked all the morning. She did not sit down for a moment until lunch-time. Then suddenly the hindrance which Jane Strong had foretold that morning came without a moment's warning. There had not been enough fish left from the dinner of the day before to prepare the ramekins for the family and allow Tommy two, unless Amelia went without. She was patiently eating a slice of bread and butter and drinking tea when she fell over in a faint. The little, thin creature slid gently into her swoon, not even upsetting her teacup. She fainted considerately, as she had always done everything else. Jane, who sat next her sister, caught her before she had fallen from her chair. Josiah sprang up, and stood looking intensely shocked and perfectly helpless. Addie ran for a smelling-bottle, and Annie leaped back and gasped, as if she were about to faint herself. Tommy stared, with a spoon half-way to his mouth. Then he swallowed the contents of the spoon from force of habit. Then he stared again, and turned pale under his freckles. The baby cried and pounded the table with his fists.

Amelia's face, under its thin film of gray hair, was very ghastly. Jane, supporting that poor



Digitized by Google

SHE FAINTED CONSIDERATELY, AS SHE HAD ALWAYS DONE EVERYTHING ELSE

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

head, looked impatiently at Josiah standing inert, with his fresh contenance fixed in that stare of helpless, almost angry, astonishment. "For goodness' sake, Josiah Lamkin," said his sister-in-law, "don't stand there gaping like a nincompoop, but go for Doctor Emerson, if you've got sense enough!" Jane came from New England, and in moments of excitement she showed plainly the influence of the land of her birth. She spoke with forcible, almost vulgar, inelegance, but she spoke with the effect of an Ethan Allen or a Stark.

Josiah moved. He made one stride for the door. Then he shot past the window on his way for the doctor.

"Stop fainting away, Annie Sears," said Jane, "and hand me that glass of water for your mother, then spank that bawling young one. You are no more faint than I am. Tommy, tell Hannah to march up-stairs lively and get your mother's bed ready." Hannah at that moment appeared in the doorway, and she promptly dropped a cup of coffee, which crashed and broke into fragments with a gush of brown liquid. At the sound of that crash there was a slight flicker of poor Amelia Lamkin's eyelids, but they immediately closed. "Let that coffee



Digitized by Google

and that cup be, now you have smashed it," said Jane Strong to Hannah, "and, for goodness' sake, stop staring, and get up-stairs lively and get Mrs. Lamkin's bed ready. Why don't you move?"

Hannah moved, and the house shook with the trembling thud of her steps on the stairs. Annie came falteringly around with the glass of water. Tommy, who, once awakened to the situation, showed remarkable sense, caught up the morning paper, and fanned his mother, while the tears rolled over his hard, boyish cheeks, and he gulped convulsively.

"Oh, what ails her?" gasped Annie, holding the glass of water to her mother's white lips.

Jane was pitiless. "She's dead, for all I know," said she. "She's an awful time coming to. For the land's sake, don't spill that water all over her! Dip your fingers in and sprinkle some on her forehead. Haven't you got any sense at all?"

Annie sprinkled her mother's forehead as if she were baptizing her. "Oh, what is it?" she moaned again.

"She's dead if she ain't fainted away," said Jane. "How do I know? But I can tell you what the matter is, Annie Sears, and you too,



Digitized by Google

Addie Lamkin" (for Addie was just returning with the little green smelling-bottle): "your mother is worn out with hard work because you've all been so afraid to cross her in slaving for everybody else and having nothing for herself. She's worked out and starved out."

Addie, holding the green bottle to her mother's little pinched nostrils, aroused at that, although her pretty, healthy young face retained a pale, shocked expression. "Mother isn't starved," she whispered.

"Yes, she is, too, living on odds and ends. She hasn't eaten a good square meal since I've been here. Hens can live on such truck, but your mother can't. She ain't a hen. Here, for goodness' sake, set down that old smelling-bottle, and, Tommy, you come here and help hold her head, and, Annie, you stop sniffing and shaking and help Addie, and we'll lay her down on the floor. She'll never come to, sitting up."

"I knew that all the time," volunteered Tommy, in a shaking voice. "Teacher said to lay Jim Addison down that time when he bumped his nose against his desk reaching down for a marble he dropped."

Between them they lowered the little inanimate form to the floor, and Tommy got a sofa



Digitized by Google

cushion from the sitting-room and put it under his mother's head. Then Jane broke down completely. She became hysterical.

"Oh, Amelia, Amelia!" she wailed, in a dreadful voice of ascending notes, "my sister, the only sister I've got! Amelia, speak to me! Amelia, can't you hear? Speak to me!"

Annie sank down on the floor beside her unconscious mother and wept weakly. Addie, with her lips firmly set, rubbed her mother's hands. Tommy fanned with all his might! The morning paper made a steady breeze above the still, white face. The baby had succeeded in reaching the sugar-bowl and had stopped crying. He was eating the lumps in the bowl, with one wary eye of mischief on the group.

Amelia did not revive. Those around her became more and more alarmed. Hannah stood in the door. She stammered out that the bed was ready; then she, too, wailed the wail of her sort, lifting high a voice of uncouth animal woe.

"She's dead, she's dead!" at last sobbed Jane. "She'll never speak to any of us again. Oh, Amelia, Amelia, to think it should come to this!"

Addie, with one furious glance at her aunt,



Digitized by Google

stopped rubbing her mother's hands. She stood back. She looked very stiff and straight. Her face was still, but tears rolled over her cheeks as if they had been marble. Annie wept with gentle grief. Jane continued to lament, as did Hannah. The baby steadily ate sugar. Tommy was the only one who held steadfast. He never whimpered, and he fanned as if life depended upon the newspaper gale.

Then there was a quick rattle of wheels, and Jane rushed to the door and shrieked out, as the doctor was fumbling for his medicine-chest:

"You're too late, doctor, you're too late!"

Poor Josiah, who had driven back with the doctor and was already out of the buggy, turned ghastly white.

"Oh, my God, doctor, she's gone!" he gasped.

The doctor, who was young and optimistic, clapped him on the shoulder. "Brace up, man!" he said, in a loud voice. Then he entered the house and the dining-room where poor Amelia lay. He pushed rather rudely past Jane and Hannah and Addie and Annie. He knelt down beside the prostrate woman, looked at her keenly, felt her wrist, and held his head to her breast. Then he addressed Tommy. "How



Digitized by Google

long has your mother been unconscious?" he asked.

Tommy glanced up at the clock. "Most half an hour," he replied. His mouth and eyes and nose twitched, but he spoke quite firmly. There was the making of a man in Tommy.

"Oh, she's dead!" wailed Jane. "Oh, Amelia! Oh, my sister, my sister!"

Doctor Emerson rose and looked at Jane Strong with cool hostility. "She is not dead unless you make her so by your lack of self-control," said he. "You must all be as quiet as you can."

Jane stopped wailing and regarded him with awed eyes, the eyes of a feminine thing cowed by the superior coolness in adversity of a male. She was afraid of that clear, pink-and-white, young masculine face, with its steady outlook of rather cold blue eyes and its firm mouth. All became quiet and obeyed Doctor Emerson's orders. Josiah, Hannah, and the doctor carried Amelia to her room, and laid her, still unconscious, upon her bed. Then, after a while, she awakened, but she was a broken creature. They hardly recognized her as Amelia. Amelia without her ready hand for them all, her ready step for their comfort, seemed hardly credible. She



Digitized by Google

lay sunken among her pillows in a curious, inert fashion. She was very small and slight, but she gave an impression of great weight, so complete was her abandonment to exhaustion, so entirely her bed sustained her, without any effort upon her part.

Addie cornered the doctor in the front hall on his way out. "What do you think is the matter with mother?" she whispered. The doctor looked at Addie's pretty, pale face. He was unmarried, and had had dreams about Addie Lamkin. He had dismissed those dreams upon the advent of Arthur Henderson. Still, the girl had almost the interest of an old love for him.

"Your mother is simply worn out, Miss Lamkin," said Doctor Emerson, curtly; yet his eyes, regarding that pretty face, were pitying.

"Worn out?" repeated Addie.

"Yes. To put it plainly, she has worked too hard for everybody else, and not hard enough for herself."

Soft rose suffused Addie's face and neck. She looked piteously at the doctor, with round eyes like a baby's, pleading not to be hurt. The doctor's tone softened a little.

"Of course I realize how almost impossible



Digitized by Google

it is to prevent self-sacrificing women like your mother from offering themselves up," he said.

Tears stood in Addie's eyes. "Mother never complained, and she seemed to want—" she returned, brokenly.

"Yes, she seemed to want to do everything and not let anybody else do anything, and every body indulged her."

"I don't think any of us realized," said Addie.

"Of course you didn't," said Doctor Emerson, and his voice, while slightly sarcastic, was still almost caressing.

"Of course now we shall see that mother does not overdo," said Addie.

"She can't—now."

Addie turned very white. "You don't mean—"

"I don't know. I shall do everything I can, but she is very weak. I never saw a case of more complete exhaustion."

After Doctor Emerson had driven out of the yard, Addie and Annie talked together, Jane Strong made gruel, and Tommy sat beside his mother. Josiah paced up and down the front walk. He had a feeling as if the solid ground was cut from under his feet. He had not known for so many years what it was to live without



Digitized by Google

the sense of Amelia's sustaining care that he felt at once unreasoning anger with her, a monstrous self-pity, and an agony of anxious love. The one clear thing in his mind was that Amelia ever since their marriage had put in his sleeve-buttons and shirt-studs. Always he saw those little, nervous, frail hands struggling with the stiff linen and the studs and buttons. It seemed to him that of all her wrongs, that was the one which he should definitely grasp. He felt that she was worn out, maybe come to her death, through putting in those buttons and studs. Josiah was a great, lumbering masculine creature, full of helpless tenderness. He paced up and down the walk. He looked at his thick fingers, and he saw always those little, slender, nervous ones struggling with his linen and buttons, and he knew what remorse was. Finally he could bear it no longer, and he entered the house and the kitchen where Jane was making the gruel.

"Doctor Emerson says she is all worn out," he said, thickly.

Jane looked at him viciously. "Of course she is worn out."

"Jane, do you think putting in my sleeve-buttons and studs hurt her?"



Digitized by Google

Jane stared at him. "Everything has hurt her together, I suppose," she replied, grimly.

Josiah went into the dining-room, where Addie and Annie stood talking together in low voices, and sobbing softly between the words. The baby was asleep in his chair, his curly head hanging sidewise. "Your mother seems to be all worn out," Josiah said to his daughters.

"Yes, she is, I am afraid," Annie said, tearfully. "If *I* had only been stronger."

"If mother had only known *she* wasn't strong," Addie said, fiercely, and Annie did not resent it. "Here I've been saying mother must be let alone to do things because it worried her not to," said Addie. "Great fool, great hypocrite!" She gave a sob of fury at herself.

"I have been thinking how she has always put in my sleeve-buttons and shirt-studs," said Josiah.

Neither Annie nor Addie seemed to hear what he said.

"If only *I* had been stronger," repeated Annie.

Addie turned on her. "You have always been enough sight stronger than mother, Annie Sears," said she. "You fairly enjoy thinking you are delicate. You think it is a feather in your cap; you know you do!"



Digitized by Google

Annie was so astonished she fairly gaped at her sister. She could not speak. Addie made a dart toward Johnny and caught him up in her arms. "Here we are letting mother's baby break his neck," said she, furiously, "standing here like great gumps. Next thing he would have tumbled out of his chair." Johnny began to wail, and Addie kissed him, then shook him. "Johnny, hush up for mercy's sake," said she. "Grandma's very sick. Here, don't cry, and auntie will give you a lump of sugar." With that Addie poked a lump of sugar into the little, soft, red mouth, and Johnny was appeased and began sucking it.

"She's always put in my sleeve-buttons and studs," said Josiah, in his miserable monotone. Then he returned to the front walk, and began pacing up and down.

Addie turned to Annie. "Annie Sears," said she, "do you know mother is up there all alone with Tommy? Why don't you go up there?"

"Let me take Johnny, and you go, Addie," Annie said, faintly.

Addie thrust Johnny upon Annie, and turned and went up-stairs. Tommy looked up as she entered the room and gave an inaudible



Digitized by Google

"hush!" "Mother is asleep," he motioned with his lips. Amelia, indeed, lay as if asleep, with her eyes partly open, and a ghastly line of white eyeball showing. Addie sat beside the bed and looked at her mother. Tommy broke down, and curved his arm in its rough sleeve around his freckled face and wept bitterly. Addie did not weep. Gradually the expression of those who renunciate stole over her face. She was making up her mind to relinquish all thoughts of marriage, to live at home single, and devote her life to her mother. Addie's face, which had been pretty with a rather hard prettiness, grew beautiful. She looked as her mother had done as a girl. The possibilities of entire self-renunciation lit it with spiritual glory. She realized that she was very unhappy; she thought of Arthur Henderson, but she said to herself that he was a man and young, and men could forget. She knew quite well that his character was not one capable of going through life without snatching at one sweet if he could not obtain another. She felt glad that it was so. She had never been so miserable and so blissful in her whole life as she was, sitting beside her mother's bed; for she, for the first time, saw beyond her own self,



Digitized by Google

and realized the unspeakable glory there. She reached out a hand and patted Tommy's heaving shoulder.

"We'll all take care of her, and she'll get well; don't cry, dear," she whispered, very softly.

But Tommy gave his shoulder an impatient shrug and wept on. He was remembering how he had worn so many holes in his mittens and his mother had mended them, and it seemed to him as if mending those mittens was the one thing which had tired her out. He made up his mind, whether she lived or died, that he would never get holes in his mittens again for anybody to mend. He would start to school with mittens on his hands, and when once out of sight of home, into his pockets they would go, and he would use his bare hands if they did get frost-bitten.

Down-stairs Annie Sears sat beside little Johnny and told him a story. She never knew what the story was about. Johnny had eaten all the sugar in the bowl, and he nestled his little curly head against Annie's shoulder while she talked in her unhappy voice. After a while Johnny's eyes closed, and Annie lifted him and carried him up-stairs and laid him on her own bed. He was a heavy child, and she bent pain-



Digitized by Google

fully beneath his weight, and reflected, the while she did so, how many times she had seen her mother toil up-stairs with him—her little mother, whose shoulders were narrower than her own.

Jane finished the bowl of gruel, while Hannah stood looking on. Jane turned upon the girl with sudden fury.

"For the land's sake, get to work, can't you?" she said. "What are you standing there for? Clear off the table, and wash the dishes, and sweep up the kitchen!"

Hannah did not resent the angry voice. She began to weep without covering her face, bawling aloud like a baby. "Oh, Lord! oh, Lord!" she wailed. "Here's that poor blessed soul all wore out doing my work while I've been standing watching her!"

"Well, you haven't got her to watch now," said Jane. "Get to work!" Hannah paddled into the dining-room, and the clatter of dishes accompanied her loud sobs. Jane carried the bowl of gruel to her sister, but poor Amelia was too spent to take more than a spoonful or two, for all her gentle willingness. "There's no use," said Jane, grimly. "She's got to have something to put some life in her. There's



Digitized by Google

that bottle of port wine down cellar that the doctor ordered for Annie, and she didn't like. I'm going to put some in this gruel."

"Won't it be an awful mess?" whispered Addie.

"Mess or not, she's got to take it. She's got to have something to put some life in her."

The cellar in the Lamkin house was approached by a trap-door in a pantry opening out of the parlor. It was a strange arrangement, but there were many strange arrangements in the Lamkin house, which was very old, had suffered many alterations, and had been built originally by an eccentric man. Nobody saw Jane Strong enter the parlor and the pantry, raise the trap-door, and descend the main stairs. Jane knew just where the port wine was kept. It was standing by itself, giving out a dusky red glow like a carbuncle, in the southwest corner of the very neat cellar. Jane had her hand on the bottle when she heard a thud, and realized that the trap-door had fallen. She did not feel at all dismayed, but when she had climbed the stairs with her wine-bottle she found herself in difficulty. The trap-door was very heavy, and there was nothing whatever to take hold of on the under side. Jane raised



Digitized by Google

herself as near the top of the stairs as she could and pushed in vain with her hands, then she butted the door with her little head banded with sleek black hair. Jane's neck was very slender, and her head was very small. She could not make the slightest impression upon the door. She descended the stairs and found a clean, empty stone jar in the northwest corner of the cellar. Jane took the lid of the jar, and with the wine-bottle still under her arm, she climbed the stairs again. Then she pounded upon the door viciously with the lid of the jar, until it suddenly broke in halves, and she, taken by surprise, fell down the stairs, with the wine-bottle, which broke. Jane Strong sat on the cellar floor and felt faint. Then came the consciousness of extreme pain in her foot and ankle. "I have spilled all that wine over my dress, I am soaked to my skin with wine, and I've sprained my ankle, maybe I've broken it; and there's Amelia up-stairs the way she is," said Jane Strong aloud, in a curiously cool, reflective voice. She had a judicial turn of mind, and she pulled herself together and considered the whole situation. "I've got to make somebody hear somehow," she said, also aloud. Jane had a very thin, reedy voice which did not



Digitized by Google

carry far. She raised it as loud as she possibly could, and she called by name, each in turn, the members of the family. She thought that possibly Tommy had the most acute hearing, and she called, "Tommy! Tommy!" oftener than any other name. Nobody came. After a while she got incensed. "Might as well give it up," said she. She wore cloth shoes with elastic at the sides, and suceeded in pulling the one on the injured foot off, although it caused her agony. She eyed the swollen foot and ankle sternly. She felt of the ankle, and became almost sure that a bone was broken. She sat still, thinking. It seemed to her that she had never really thought in all her life before. Jane Strong had kept all the commandments from her youth up. She had always been considered a most exemplary woman by other people, and she had acquiesced in their opinion. Now suddenly she differed with other people and with her own previous estimation of herself. She had blamed her sister Amelia Lamkin for her sweet, subtle selfishness, which possibly loved the happiness of other people rather than their own spiritual gain; she had blamed all the Lamkin family for allowing a martyr to live among them, with no effort to save her from



Digitized by Google

the flame of her own self-sacrifice. Now suddenly she blamed herself. She pictured to herself her easy, unhampered life in her nice little apartment, and was convicted of enormous selfishness in her own righteous person. "Lord!" she said, "what on earth have I been thinking about? I knew Amelia was overworked. What was to hinder my coming here at least half the year and taking some of the burden off her? I knew Addie was young, and Annie none too strong, and Josiah fussy, like all men. Why didn't I come? And now here she is flat on her back, and maybe she'll never get up; and here I am with a broken ankle, and can't do a thing. You've made a nice mess of it, Jane Strong! Instead of snooping around to find the sins of other folks, you'd better have looked at home. Good land!" Tears rolled down Jane's cheeks. Then she wiped them away with a hand wet with port wine, and she raised her voice and called again. She sat there vainly calling until the light began to wane; then it was Josiah who heard. Josiah, who had been in the house, gazing at his prostrate wife, and going to his daughters for comfort, and then returned to his miserable promenade on the front walk, heard her through the cellar window.



Digitized by Google

He hurried into the house and met Addie.

"Somebody's calling me, and it sounds like it came from the cellar," he stammered. His nerves were so unstrung that he felt a shiver of superstition

Addie also felt an answering thrill of horror. "What do you think it is, father?" she whispered, fearfully.

"Don't know. Sounds like a cat calling 'Josiah!' as near as anything else."

The two stood looking at each other.

"Where is Aunt Jane?" asked Addie.

"I don't know."

"Annie and I have been looking for her, and she doesn't seem to be in the house."

"If she were here she would go down cellar and see what it was," said Josiah, with open weakness.

Addie straightened herself. "Nonsense, father! We will go together," said she.

When they had opened the trap-door in the parlor pantry, and peered down into the gloom, and heard the faint voice from below, Addie gave a cry and hurried down the stairs.

"Goodness, Aunt Jane!" said she, "is that you?"



Digitized by Google

"Yes, it's me." groaned Jane. Then she began to weep. "Oh, Lord, it's a judgment on me!" said she.

"Are you hurt? How did you come down here?"

"Fell down. Oh, Lord, it's a judgment on me!"

"What did you come here for? How came the trap-door shut?"

"It fell down. I came for that bottle of port wine for your poor mother. It broke when I fell. I was trying to knock on the trap-door with the lid of that jar, and I fell. I'm all wine from head to foot."

"Are you hurt?"

"Guess my ankle is broken. It pains me something dreadful, but I don't care. It's a judgment on me! I've been terrible selfish about your mother. It's a judgment on me!"

"Seems to me there's judgments on all of us," said Addie, rather sharply, although there was pity in her voice as she stooped over her aunt, but she was wondering what could be done, with her mother so ill and her aunt crippled.

Josiah stood over his sister-in-law, a helpless bulk of a man, drooping in every muscle before this new calamity.



Digitized by Google

"Can't you get up, Jane?" he inquired, quaveringly.

"For the land's sake, Josiah Lamkin, do you suppose I'd sit here catching my death of cold on this cellar floor if I could get up?" responded Jane.

"Father, you had better run as fast as you can and get Doctor Emerson. He said he would come again to see mother, but he may not until after his office hour," said Addie. "I'll get some pillows and a shawl, and Hannah can make some hot tea. Then I think you and Doctor Emerson can get her up-stairs. Hannah and I will have everything ready in her room."

Josiah, for the second time that day, raced for the doctor. Annie came and sat on the cellar stairs, while poor Jane drank her tea, and wept softly at this disaster.

Jane gulped down the tea in a sort of fury. "I don't deserve this tea," said she, "and I wouldn't touch it, but I've got to make trouble enough as it is without getting pneumonia. I don't know whether it is as dangerous to set soaked through with wine as it is with water, but I'm wet to the skin, anyhow, and all of a shake. How is she?"



Digitized by Google

"She just lies there, and she looks like death," moaned Annie.

"We've all been killing her, and now she's *killed*, I guess," said Jane.

"We didn't realize," said Annie. "If only I had been stronger!"

"For the Lord's sake, don't talk any more about being strong," said Jane. "You'd better hustle round and *get* strong. You've been as strong as your mother right along, and she has never said a word."

"I know it," Annie said. She bent over, and her whole slender body shook with sobs.

"For the land's sake," said Jane, "stop crying! You don't want to make yourself sick and have another to take care of. There's enough as it is. If Harry comes home and finds you've been crying, there'll be an awful to-do. He acts like a pox fool about you, and always did. I believe he's put it into your head about not being strong, anyhow. He's seen your mother getting up and getting his early breakfast for him, and he hasn't thought it was anything."

"I'm going to get Harry's breakfast now."

"You'd better. If a woman has married a man who has to gulp his breakfast and race for



Digitized by Google

an early train, it's her place to get it for him, and not her poor old mother's."

"I am going to," said Annie. Then she wept again.

Meanwhile, Amelia Lamkin was lying in her peaceful bed up-stairs in a very trance of happiness. She was quite conscious. She had not a pain. She realized an enormous weakness and sheer inability to move, but along with it came the blessed sense of release from hard duties. Almost for the first time in her life Amelia Lamkin's conscience did not sting her because she was not up and doing for others. She knew that it was impossible. She felt like one who has received absolution. The weight of her life had slipped from her shoulders. She regarded Tommy's pale, disturbed face, but even that did not trouble her, so sunken was she in the peace of weakness and sweet irresponsibility. She made one effort to speak to him, to comfort him; then she gave it up, and lay smiling the ghost of a smile. It did not seem to her that he could be really distressed when she was not suffering and was relieved of the weight of existence under which she had staggered so long. The faces of the other members of her family came before her mental



Digitized by Google

vision, and she beheld them with immense love and no anxiety. The sense of being herself so entirely in the arms of Providence, of being undriven by any lash of duty, filled her with peace concerning them. She was beatifically happy, while the others were bemoaning her condition, and while Jane was being attended to in another room for her badly sprained ankle, which would disable her for weeks, perhaps for life. They worried lest Amelia should hear some noise which would awaken her suspicion, lest she should ask for her sister, and be alarmed at her absence, but they had no occasion for worry. Amelia, for the time being, was past alarm. She missed nobody. She wanted nothing except to lie there in her clean white bed and feel that she need not move. The days went on, and her condition did not change.

She lay still day after day, opening her mouth obediently for the spoonfuls of sustenance which were given her, half dozing, half waking, and wholly happy. All her life she had done what she could, and all her life she had been anxious lest she should not do what she could. Now that she knew that she could do no more there came upon her a perfect peace. She



Digitized by Google

did not know that Jane was confined to her bed with her injured foot. She did not know that Addie had turned a cold shoulder to Arthur Henderson, and that he was already engaged to Eliza Loomis. She did not know of the harrowing anxiety concerning her. She knew naught but her conviction that nothing was required of her except to lie still, that other people required nothing except that, that God required nothing except that. Addie always wore a cheerful face when with her mother. Indeed, the readiness with which Arthur Henderson had given her up had caused her pride to act as a tonic, and her eyes had been opened. She knew that she had never cared for a man who could relinquish her without more effort, and whose loss had caused her no more pain. At first she thought that her love and anxiety for her mother had made her callous, but after a little she knew. She even laughed at herself because she had once thought it possible for her to marry Arthur Henderson. She could not yet laugh at the prospect of the life of self-immolation which she ordered for herself since the day her mother had been taken ill, but she was schooling herself to contemplate it cheerfully, although the doctor, with his daily visits



Digitized by Google

to her mother, was now making it hard. Addie began to realize that this man, had she allowed herself to think of him, might have been more difficult to relinquish than the other. After a while she saw him as little as possible, and received his directions through Annie. Addie and Annie had their days full. They were glad when Tommy's spring vacation came. Tommy was of much assistance, and he developed a curious aptitude for making Hannah work. "Now, Hannah, if you are any girl at all, if you ever mean to get married yourself and not have your fellow light out the first week, it's time for you to brace up and hustle," said Tommy; and the next morning Hannah achieved surprising biscuits and well-cooked eggs. Addie ate her eggs cooked any way now, and so did Annie, and Josiah Lamkin never said a word if his steak were not quite as rare as usual, and Johnny ate his rice half-cooked, and survived.

Amelia's window-shades were up all day, for the doctor said she should have all the light and sun possible; and as spring advanced she could see, with those patient eyes which apparently saw nothing, the blue sky crossed with tree branches deepening in color before they burst into leaf and flower. Amelia saw not only



Digitized by Google

those branches, but beyond them, as though they were transparent, other branches, but those other branches grew on the trees of God, and were full of wonderful blooms; and beyond the trees she saw the far-away slope of mountains, and through them in turn the curves of beauty of the Delectable Hills. When Amelia closed her eyes, the picture of those trees beyond trees, those mountains beyond mountains, was still with her, and she saw also heavenly landscapes, rich green meadows, and pearly floods, and gardens of lilies, and her vision, which had been content for years with only the dear simple beauties of her little village, was fed to her soul's delight and surfeit. But she was too weak to speak more than a word at a time, and she scarcely seemed to know one of her dear ones. Poor Amelia Lamkin was so tired out in their service that she had gone almost out of their reach for her rest.

At last came a warm day during the first of May, when people said about the village that Mrs. Amelia Lamkin was very low indeed. The air was very soft and full of sweet languor, and those partly opened eyes of Amelia's saw blossoms through blossoms on the tree branches. In the afternoon Doctor Emerson came, and



Digitized by Google

Addie did not shun him. Her mind was too full of her mother for a thought of any human soul beside. She and the young man stood in Amelia's room over the prostrate little figure, and the doctor took up the slender hand and felt for the pulse in the blue-veined wrist. Then he went over by the window, and stood there with Addie, and Amelia's eyes, which had been closed, opened slowly, and she saw the blooming boughs of the trees of heaven through *them* also. Addie was weeping softly, but her mother did not know it, at first, in her rapt contemplation. She did not see Doctor Emerson put an arm around the girl's waist, she did not hear what he said to her, but suddenly she *did* hear what the girl said. She heard it more clearly than anything since she had been taken ill. "I can't think of such things with mother lying there the way she is," Addie said, in a whisper. "I wonder at you."

"She can't hear a word; she does not know," said the young man; and Amelia, listening, was surprised to learn how little a physician really knows himself, when she was hearing and understanding every word, and presently seeing. "I would not speak now," Doctor Emerson continued. "I know it must seem untimely to



Digitized by Google

you, but you have been through so much all these weeks, and it is possible that more still is before you soon, and I feel that if you can consent to lean upon me as one who loves you more than anybody else in the world, I may take it all easier. You know I love you, dear."

"You can't love me. I have been an unworthy daughter," Addie sobbed.

"An unworthy daughter? I have never seen such devotion."

"The devotion came too late," Addie replied, bitterly. "If mother had had a little more devotion years ago, she would be up and about now. There is no use talking, Doctor Emerson; you don't know me as I know myself or you wouldn't once think of me; but, anyway, it is out of the question."

"Why?"

"Because," said Addie, firmly, "I have resolved never to marry, never to allow any other love or interest to come between me and my own family. If mother—" Addie could not finish the sentence. She went on, with a word omitted: "I must make all the restitution to her in my power by devoting my whole life to her dear ones, to Tommy and the baby and father.



Digitized by Google

Annie is delicate, although now she tries to think she isn't, and is doing so much, and Aunt Jane will never be able to walk as well as before she sprained her ankle falling down those cellar stairs. You know that."

Amelia heard. It was the first she had known of Jane's accident.

"She is getting on very well," Doctor Emerson said, rather evasively.

"Yes, but she is lame. That is the reason she won't come in here, though I have told her poor mother wouldn't notice. Aunt Jane has said that if it were not for her lameness she would come here and keep house, but she is a woman older than mother, and she *is* lame. There is nobody except myself to keep up the home here, and any other arrangement is out of the question."

"We could live here, dear," said the young man, and his voice sounded young and pleasing and pitiful. Amelia herself loved him as he spoke. But Addie turned upon him with a sort of fierceness.

"Don't talk to me any more," she said. "Haven't you eyes? Don't you see I can't bear it? We *could* live here, but you — and maybe others—would come between me and my



Digitized by Google

sacred trust. It can't be, Edward. If mother had lived—" (she spoke of her mother as already dead). "Of course with Aunt Jane—I think she will live here now, anyway, and she *can* do a good deal—and with Annie, they could have got along, and I don't say I would not have. Of course it must cost me something to give up the sort of life a girl naturally expects. Don't talk to me any more."

Then Amelia sat up in bed. Her eyes were opened wide; they had seen her last of heavenly visions until the time when they should close forever. In a flash she saw how selfish it was for her, this patient, loving woman, who had thought of others all her life, to be happy in giving up her life. She realized, too, what she had never felt when in the midst of them, the torture and the fires of martyrdom in which her life had been spent. Now that the unselfishness of others had quenched those fires, she knew what had been, and saw how fair the world might yet be for her. She reached back her loving, longing, willing hands to her loved ones of earth and her earthly home. Amelia spoke in quite a clear, strong voice. Addie turned with a great start, and screamed, "Mother!" and Doctor Emerson was by her



Digitized by Google

side in an instant. Amelia looked at them and smiled the smile of a happy, awakening infant.

"I am better," said she; "I am going to get well now. I have lain here long enough."

Digitized by Google

# THE TRAVELLING SISTER

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# THE TRAVELLING SISTER

THE Allerton sisters lived in a grand but very lonely old mansion on the side of Allerton Mountain. Allertonville, a white-steepled little village, lay in the valley below. Everything pertained to the Allertons as if they had belonged to a feudal family, and as if their old mansion-house had been a castle. Indeed, the name of Allerton had been a great one in all the countryside. They had been "college-learned," as the village people expressed it, and they had had great possessions. Now, however, the possessions had dwindled sadly. The males of the family were all gone; women had preponderated during the last two generations, and women like those of the Allerton stock are not financiers. For that matter the males had not distinguished themselves in increasing their assets; neither had they been



Digitized by Google

good economists. Most of their riches had come through inheritance. The family had been wealthy collaterally, as well as in the direct line. Streams of gold and silver had poured in from all sides as one Allerton after another had passed away and left earthly riches behind. But now the springs of wealth had all run dry. There was no more coming, and that in hand was slowly but steadily diminishing.

The Allerton ladies pinned their faith upon their lawyer, John H. Fields. He and his father before him had had charge of the Allerton fortunes. The Allertons esteemed him as most reliable, and in a sense he was. Nobody could question his honesty; but how much could a little average-brained man who had been born in Allertonville and lived there to old age know of the maelstrom of Wall Street and the strange catastrophes, seemingly far removed from all possible connection with three elderly ladies and their fortune, but which nevertheless had a dire influence upon them? To his dying day John H. Fields would never understand why when a certain speculative stock declined, in which he had not invested and of which he had scarcely heard, an investment of bonds which he had always considered most conservative



Digitized by Google

passed dividends. Mr. Fields dreaded telling the Allerton ladies.

However, on the day following the notice in the New York paper he drove slowly up Allerton Mountain. His tall gray horse took his own gait, nodding at every step. John held the lines loosely and leaned back in his buggy. He was unmarried, and there was always a certian male coquettishness about him when he called upon the Allerton sisters, although he had no dreams whatever concerning them. John H. Fields had never thought seriously of marrying anybody. He was born to his own rut, with a scared, rabbit-like imagination for all outside. Still, he was at times involuntarily coquettish. This afternoon he wore a nice little gray alpaca coat which exactly matched his gray trousers. His linen shone. He wore the neatest of little black satin ties, glossy little shoes, a gleaming white hat, and, like the precious high light of it all, a perfect white rosebud was tucked in his buttonhole. His narrow, clean-cut face was clean shaven, and the hair at the sides of his head was like a shade of silver. He usually had an expression of blank, peering serenity, as meaningless as the light upon the bowl of a silver spoon, but now his



Digitized by Google

forehead was contracted and his eyes were speculative.

It was the second week of an unusually hot June. There had been no rain.

The wayside weeds hung like limp rags, all powdered with dust. Dust came up in little smoke-like puffs from under his horse's hoofs. Fields glanced complacently at his gray attire, which would not show dust; then he thought of the passed dividends of those railroad bonds, and frowned again. He knew to a dollar the extent of his clients' income—that is, with one exception—and he feared lest this decrease might interfere with their summer programme. He passed slowly up the mountain. The road wound; still it was steep in places. Great patches of dark wet appeared upon the sides of the horse. Fields drew out a clean handkerchief and, without disturbing the folds, carefully wiped his face, which was slightly flushed. That was just before he reached the avenue of pine-trees leading to the Allerton house. When he drove beneath the high-plumed branches, and heard their far-away murmur, and the torrid glare of the road was left for a vista of cool purplish green, he drew a long breath. People generally drew long breaths of relief when they



Digitized by Google

entered that pine avenue upon a hot day. Fields could see at the end the white Doric pillars of the house: a large Colonial edifice, all shining with fresh white paint. The house had been newly painted that spring. The lawyer thought uneasily that it might have been deferred for another year had he anticipated those passed dividends, and then the summer plans of Miss Camille and Miss Susanne Allerton need not have been disturbed.

The wide veranda under the Doric pillars was clean swept and vacant. There were two heads at the two front windows on the left side of the front door. They nodded with dignified grace as he passed. He knew that there was another head at a side window, that of Miss Hélène Allerton, the youngest of the three sisters. He did not think uneasily of her as being affected by the passed dividends, because she had her own little private fortune in her own right, inherited from the aunt for whom she had been named. Miss Hélène had dealt with another lawyer with regard to that inheritance—a lawyer in a little city ten miles away. John H. had never known its exact extent nor how it was invested. There was in



Digitized by Google

consequence a slight feeling of coldness on his part toward Miss Hélène.

When he had driven into the barn with its arched door, and the old man who with his wife were the only servants in attendance had tied his horse, and received instructions to give him sparingly of water when he was somewhat cooled, John took out his folded handkerchief again, gave a little flick at his smooth face, another at his coat fronts, another at his knees, then passed around to the front door, and clanged decorously with the knocker. Neither Miss Susanne nor Miss Camille moved their heads again. Their white right hands flashed up as regularly as mowers mowing in line. The wife of the serving-man answered the knock. She was small and wizened, with an unmistakably Irish gleam in her blue eyes, and her fair skin was as freckled as a baby's. Her name was Bridget O'Haligan, and her husband's name was Pat O'Haligan. The ladies called her Brigitte, with a soft flop of accent upon the last syllable. Her husband's name, being hopeless, they had metamorphosed entirely. They called him Louis. There was in the Allerton family an affectation so harmless, and to the village people so unique, that it com-



Digitized by Google

pelled respect, even admiration. They affected—all the Allertons had done so for years, and the three sisters did likewise—a French pose toward the rest of humanity. The family tree framed in dull gold hung in the hall, and upon one of the stiff branches perched a long-dead collateral ancestor who bore a French name. Upon the strength of this one alien element, which distinguished them especially from all about, the Allertons had based their little affectation. The ladies all spoke French, it was said, with a remarkably pure accent. It was confidently repeated that the sisters could live in France and never be mistaken for Americans. Hélène was reported to have been many times in France, and nobody had ever found her out.

This harmless affectation had endured long in the Allerton family. Many branches of the tree bore French Christian names, uniformly accented upon the last syllable. The father of the three sisters had been Honoré. There had been another sister, Lucille, who had died when a very young girl. Her pretty name was near her father's upon a lower branch of the tree, and one could fancy her as a very small bird fluttering hence down to her little grave be-



Digitized by Google

neath another tree which wept every spring with long tears of gold-green.

When Fields entered the parlor, the long parlor with its six windows—the Allerton ladies had always wished to call it the salon, but had never quite dared make such an innovation—there was distinctly evident what seemed a slight foreign element. A steel-engraving of Napoleon was conspicuous upon the wall which caught the best light. There were also steel-engravings of Marie Antoinette and the Dauphin, and many of French nobodies in particular, characterized by high curled coiffures, sidewise wreaths of rosebuds, and looped flowered skirts. The faded paper was done in a pattern of flower-baskets tied together with knots of silver ribbon. The furniture was upholstered in dim satin of a First Empire pattern, and its shape was First Empire. The floor was a polished wood, with an old French carpet slipping about in the centre; there were Sèvres vases filled with roses on the tables and shelf, and candlesticks of French make stood on either side of the French clock.

There was about the Allerton ladies themselves, American born and bred as they were, something strangely foreign. They did not



Digitized by Google

quite venture upon the high powdered pompadours of the ladies upon their walls, but their gray locks were marvellously puffed and piled above their high, delicate temples, under which their black eyes flashed with youthful fire, although they were past youth, even the youngest of them. There was not much difference in their ages. As girls the Allerton sisters had been poetically likened by admirers to three roses upon one stem. They were unmistakably of the same family; all had the same high, thin cast of aristocratic face, with delicate nostrils, small, sweetly compressed mouths, and pointed chins. All had long, slender hands with very pointed finger-tips. All had very pointed tips of tiny feet; all sat erect in tightly laced stays, with wide, carefully disposed skirts. All wore frills of lace around their throats, fastened with amethysts and pearls in old French settings. These jewels had come down to them from that long-dead French ancestor upon the family tree, who had scattered his gems upon posterity when he left the world, and strewn the dark of his passing with pearly and purple and golden gleams. There was a tradition that these old jewels had belonged to a French duchess whom the Allertons rather blushed to mention, al-



Digitized by Google

though they were secretly proud at the idea of possessing gems once worn by so doubtfully honored a dame. The youngest sister, Hélène, wore amethysts set in silver, and a broad gold bracelet with a wonderful coral cameo almost covered the turn of her slender wrist as she sewed. All three sisters embroidered industriously after they had formally greeted their family lawyer. People in Allertonville were always speculating concerning this embroidery. They wondered what it was, and if it was ever finished. Miss Susanne embroidered in white upon fine linen; Miss Camille, also in white upon fine linen; Miss Hélène, always in colored silks upon blue satin.

Miss Hélène had been unlike her sisters in one respect. They had been lovely and graceful, with an air of high breeding, but she had been a great beauty. She was in her own way a great beauty still. Her face retained its charming contour, its satin complexion, its expression of that indescribable sweetness which confirms beauty in its possessor. She wore a gown of ancient, faintly flowered silk. Her arms were round and fair, and her lace-trimmed sleeves fell away from them as she embroidered. A wonderful great pearl gleamed upon the third finger of her left hand.



Digitized by Google

That was the only ring which she ever wore, and with it was connected the romance of her life: the one romance, although she had been sought in marriage by many. She had loved and been betrothed to a young clergyman, who had been consumptive, and gone to the south of France to recover his health, and died. It was a very simple romance, but she had never had another, and she had worn her young lover's ring all these years. Her life had been apparently quite peaceful and contented. If the Allerton ladies ever rebelled at their lots, they accepted them with dignity. With all their pride in their French lineage, they evinced nothing of French emotionalism. They were staid and sedate under all vicissitudes; no mortal had ever seen one of them shed a tear since she was a child. They never laughed with abandon.

After John H. Fields had told the ladies about the passed dividends, Miss Camille took another careful stitch, and also Miss Susanne and Miss Hélène.

Fields was sitting in an old embroidered chair, his stick in his hand, leaning forward upon it. He had left his hat in the hall, but he had clung to his stick. His masculine nature required some slight material support, although,



Digitized by Google

after all, he had known exactly how his clients would receive his news. There was not the slightest evidence of disturbance in one of them. Only, after a pause, Miss Hélène remarked: "The directors are taking advantage of the panic, and are keeping the revenues for themselves this quarter. They will not dare to pass next quarter." Miss Hélène was the one of them who read the newspapers and drew her own deductions, sometimes caustic. This caustic estimate of outside proceedings was the only indication which she ever gave of her possible discontent with her own monotony of life. Fields hastened, although with much deference, to give her his own views. "They state that the passing of dividends is caused by necessary improvements," he said.

Miss Hélène nodded and set another stitch. "No doubt," said she, "necessary improvements in the country houses of the directors or the purchase of new motor-cars. Their expenses must be heavy. They will not pass dividends next quarter, sisters."

"It will not inconvenience us in the least," said Camille, with dignity.

"Not in the least," said Miss Susanne.

Then the maid servant entered, bearing a



Digitized by Google

THE SISTERS DISCOURSED OF THE WEATHER

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

great silver tray laden with egg-shell cups and saucers, a silver basket with golden squares of sponge-cake, and a solid silver teapot, creamer, and sugar-bowl. Miss Hélène arose and seated herself at a little mahogany tea-table covered with a damask cloth, whose rose pattern gleamed like frosted silver, and poured tea.

When all were sipping tea and nibbling cake, the maid almost slyly removed the lid from a great Indian china rose-jar which stood under the mantel, and immediately it seemed as if there were another presence in the room: the multiple ghost, many-winged and many-songed, of old summers. This was the usual proceeding after the guest was served with tea. The little lawyer made no sign of noticing it, but he inhaled the strange spicy odor with content. If he had let himself go, there was about him something of the sybarite, but he had never let himself go and never would.

The sisters discoursed of the weather and kindred topics, and did not mention the passed dividends until Fields arose. Then Miss Camille said, serenely:

"I suppose, of course, then, it is settled that we are not to expect our usual returns from that investment on the first of July?"



Digitized by Google

"I fear not," stammered the lawyer. "I am sorry, but, as you know, it is one of the old investments which your father before you, and my father before me, favored. I trust it will make no difference in your plans."

"Not at all," said Miss Hélène, in her sweet, slightly decisive voice. "Not at all. My sisters will go to Hopton Springs as usual during the first week of next month. I shall be entirely able to supply funds from my inheritance."

Miss Camille's face visibly brightened. Miss Susanne looked sharply at her sister, then she smiled. "Thank you, dear Hélène," said she.

The lawyer also looked relieved. "I am very glad," he said; and made his stiff adieux, got into his buggy, and drove away down the avenue. When by himself a smirk which his face had worn relaxed. He said to himself how foolish he had been to even dream that ladies like the Allerton sisters would receive unpleasant news unpleasantly. He had a great admiration for them; at the same time he was happy to get away from them. He had, as always when with them, experienced a strain as of standing upon his spiritual tiptoes.

But on their parts the Allerton sisters also relaxed. That pose, of so long standing that



Digitized by Google

it was hardly a pose at all, but their natural attitude of self-restraint and dignity, vanished. Miss Camille looked at Susanne and Susanne looked at her; both faces wore expressions of anxiety. Then they looked at Hélène. She regarded them with her sweet, benevolent smile, which had in it a hint of whimsicality and disdain of the minor tribulations of life. Hélène's smile had always been of that character since she had lost her lover in her early youth. Everything after that had seemed very small to her. Therefore she was indifferent in the face of all little worries, and she defied them, armed as she was with her knowledge of, and survival of, greater.

"Hélène," said Susanne.

"Hélène," said Camille.

"Well, sisters?" returned Hélène.

"It is not right for you to spare that money that we may go as usual to Hopton Springs," said Susanne.

"No, it is not," repeated Camille; but she flushed evidently as she spoke, and both Susanne and Hélène laughed softly.

"What will Major Bryant do if you are not there?" inquired Hélène.

"Yes," said Susanne, "what will he do?"



Digitized by Google

"There are plenty of other ladies at Hopton Springs," responded Camille, softly, but her flush deepened. "He will have no difficulty in finding a partner at bezique. I for one will never consent to take your money," said Camille.

"Nor I," said Susanne.

"I fear it will deprive you of your summer vacation," said Camille.

"Yes, I also fear that," said Susanne.

Both spoke with a slightly unpleasant emphasis. Hélène had always been as reticent with regard to her summer vacations as with regard to her inheritance. She always told her sisters upon their return from Hopton Springs that she also had been enjoying a very pleasant outing, but she never said where she had been, and both Camille and Susanne were too proud to inquire. They agreed that it was not as if Hélène were a young girl. "She is nearly as old as I am," Camille would remark.

"And there is only a very slight difference between your age and mine," Susanne would rejoin. "Hélène is of years of discretion; besides, she is an Allerton and a lady and our own sister. It is inconceivable that—"

"Yes, it is inconceivable," Camille would



Digitized by Google

hasten to say, with severity. "I am surprised that you should—"

"I did not, Camille," Susanne would assure her. "Of course Hélène goes to some perfectly genteel place befitting a lady and an Allerton."

"Of course," said Camille.

However, although they always arrived at an apparently satisfied conclusion concerning Hélène's plans for the summer, there was always an undercurrent of dissent and annoyance in the minds of the elder sisters. Hélène never seemed to be aware of it. She responded now as serenely as ever.

"It will not make the slightest change in my plans, I assure you, sisters," she said.

Both Camille and Susanne brightened visibly.

"Will you go away yourself as usual? Can you afford it?" asked Camille, eagerly.

"I certainly can," replied Hélène. She smiled, and her smile was at once whimsical, sweet, and patient. She folded her embroidery and arose. "It is time for me to superintend Brigitte about supper," she said, and went out of the room, trailing her whispering flowered silk skirt.

When the door had closed softly after her —an Allerton sister had never in her life closed



Digitized by Google

a door otherwise than softly—Camille and Susanne looked at one another.

"Dear Hélène is very kind," said Susanne.

"Yes," responded Camille. Then she added, thoughtfully: "If she had not been able to take her vacation at her own expense, if she had been obliged to share the money with us, then none of us could have gone all these years."

"Yes, that is true."

"We never could have gone to Hopton Springs at all," said Camille. She blushed, and her voice was full of wondering conviction. "Not at all," she repeated.

"We certainly could not if Hélène had asked to be considered in the vacation expenses. She must have received quite a large legacy from Aunt Hélène."

"Yes," assented Camille.

Then both sisters blushed. It seemed to them rather disgraceful to allude in such frank fashion to a legacy.

"Poor Aunt Hélène!" replied Susanne.

"She was a very beautiful woman," sighed Camille. "I remember her very well."

"Yes, so do I," said Susanne. "I am pleased that we shall be able to go to Hopton Springs, and I know you are, dear."



Digitized by Google

Camille blushed and nodded her delicate head.

"I have already begun to realize that sense of languor which comes over me here in the summer months," said Susanne.

"Yes, dear, you really do need the change," Camille returned, eagerly.

"I would not accept the money from Hélène if I were not sure that she is making no sacrifice, and would go herself, as usual," said Susanne.

"Neither would I."

Camille and Susanne regarded each other meditatively.

"It is singular where dear Hélène goes summers," said Camille, at length.

Susanne nodded. Camille had spoken in a whisper, and a silent nod seemed the most fitting response.

"Well, of course, wherever dear Hélène goes, it is eminently fitting," said Camille.

Susanne nodded.

"But of course it would be very gratifying to us, her older sisters—"

"We are very slightly older."

"Still, we are slightly older—to know in the event of one of us being ill or—"

"The letters are always forwarded which we send here from Hopton Springs, and Hélène



Digitized by Google

has promised that we should know immediately if she were ill or needed us."

"Still, it is not satisfactory," said Camille. Then she added, and her whisper was like a thread of finely drawn silk: "I wonder—if Louis and Brigitte know?"

"We cannot question servants concerning our sister."

"Certainly not; only I wonder—"

Then a door was thrown open, and Brigitte stood there, and the fragrance of tea, hot biscuits, and fried chicken floated into the room.

The next day Camille and Susanne began the preparations for their outing. Hélène was unusually solicitous concerning them. She seemed especially interested in Camille's wardrobe. She sewed assiduously, laying aside her embroidery, making and altering festive garments for her sister. Hélène was very skilful with her needle.

One evening, about a week after the lawyer's visit, Hélène entered Susanne's room. Susanne was in bed, and looked up at her wonderingly. Hélène looked very tall and fair in her dimity dressing-gown. She carried no candle, for the full moon gave enough light, and in that pale radiance she appeared quite young. She pulled



Digitized by Google

a chair to Susanne's bedside, and began talking.

"Sister, dear," she said, "there is something which I wish to say to you. I do not wish Camille to hear, so I have chosen this time and place."

Susanne looked at her questioningly.

Hélène hesitated a moment. "I have been thinking," she said at last, "about—"

Susanne waited, staring at her.

"About Major Bryant," Hélène said, with a gasp. Her face flushed.

Susanne sat up in bed. "What about him?" she asked, in a trembling voice.

Then Hélène spoke out her mind. She had heard many allusions to this Major Bryant. She wished to know if Susanne thought that he had been really attentive to Camille.

"Hélène," said Susanne, fervently, and her voice trembled like a girl's, "I do believe that poor man has worshipped the very ground Camille has trodden on from the first."

"That was a long time ago, too," said Hélène.

"Yes, the Major has been at Hopton Springs a good many years now."

"And you think Camille has always known —that he made it plain?"

"I know he did, sister."



Digitized by Google

"And at that time, however she may feel now, Camille was justified in considering a proposal," said Hélène.

Susanne hesitated.

"Why did she not, if she liked him, and I begin to think she always has?"

"I think," replied Susanne, "that Camille remembered the sad ending to your romance, and she knew Major Bryant would have to come here. He lives in New York at a club, and of course Camille could not live in New York at a club; and besides, she would not wish to leave her home for any man. He would have been obliged to come here to live, and I rather think she feared lest he might disturb your—the peace of us all."

"That is perfect nonsense," said Hélène. Then she bent closely toward her sister and spoke earnestly. "I know, Susanne," said she, "that none of us are young, but, after all, much happiness often comes from a marriage late in life—that is, if two really love each other. If this man, Major Bryant, is personable and is fond of Camille, and she of him, I wish that you would do all you are able to bring it to pass. I think, for many reasons, it would be well to have a man at the head here. I think I re-



Digitized by Google

member your saying that Major Bryant is an able man?"

"Oh, very able. I have no doubt."

"I do not feel quite satisfied with Lawyer Fields," said Hélène. "I think that he means entirely well, and serves us to the best of his ability, but I doubt his ability. None of us know much about business. I think a man at the head of this house would be very desirable."

"I think that Major Bryant is well-to-do himself."

"That, of course, has nothing whatever to do with it," said Hélène, with dignity. "There is enough here still with proper care."

"Of course," murmured Susanne, abashed.

"I wish," said Hélène, "that if this man is at Hopton Springs this summer, and seems as devoted as ever, you would delicately hint to Camille my views concerning the desirability of any plans which she may make, and I wish that you would do all in your power, without, of course, exceeding propriety, to bring about such an arrangement."

"Yes, I will, Hélène," stammered Susanne. Then Hélène went out, closing the door softly behind her, and Susanne lay awake, and wept a little. Camille's possible marriage seemed



Digitized by Google

like a cataclysm. She was not in the least jealous, but a pain of curiosity assailed her. No romance had ever come to her. She wondered with a sense of injury what it was like. Romance in the family at this late date seemed to her like the advent of an uncanny spring in the midst of winter.

Next day she knew perfectly well what it meant when Hélène pressed upon Camille's acceptance a beautiful gown of embroidered muslin, which had been long among her treasures, and also one of lavender satin.

"Of course the satin is perfectly appropriate," said Hélène, "and I understand that nowadays ladies much older than we are wear white. I know they dress a great deal at Hopton Springs, and this muslin with my pearl necklace will make a charming evening costume for you, Camille."

"But," faltered Camille, "will you not want to wear the muslin yourself, Hélène, and the pearls, and the lavender satin? Do not ladies dress so much where you go?"

Hélène laughed rather queerly. "Not much," she replied; "and in any case I have plenty besides. I have my gray satin and my black lace. Your black lace requires a little altera-



Digitized by Google

tion, Camille, and I think some fresh violets are necessary in your lace bonnet. I saw very pretty violets at the milliner's in the village last week."

It followed that Camille went to Hopton Springs that summer with a really charming wardrobe, which she wore charmingly. Camille had been in her youth the least beautiful of the sisters, but her features had been more solid, and had resisted admirably the wear of time. She was a dream in her soft white embroidered muslin, with her slightly silvered hair piled high on her head, and surmonted by a wonderful shell comb; and Major Bryant was there to see.

Camille and Susanne remained at Hopton Springs through August and half of September. They did not know where Hélène was, and nobody else knew, unless it was the old servants, and they kept their own counsel. It was reported in the village that Hélène had gone to Europe. It had often been so reported before. Hélène had the reputation of a great traveller. Allertonville people believed that she alone of the sisters had in reality gone to France and spoken French. It was even whispered that she had been around the world. Sometimes even her sisters, with their utter ignorance of Hélène's



Digitized by Google

resources, wondered if possibly she spent a summer abroad now and then. They wondered during this last summer.

"She may have run over to France," Camille said, now and then, to Susanne.

"Possibly," assented Susanne.

"She must have a considerable income from dear Aunt Hélène," said Camille.

"Of course she must, to have taken vacations all these years, and not been obliged to require her own share of the extra money from the estate," said Susanne; "and it is quite possible that she may have run over to France."

"Perhaps to the south of France, to see where *he* died," murmured Camille. She spoke sentimentally and blushed, and Susanne regarded her with admiring curiosity. It was a hot summer, and she reflected that it might be very uncomfortable in the south of France, but she also reflected that she herself knew nothing whatever about the leadings of love and loving memories which would enable one to gain a melancholy sweetness from discomfort.

When Camille and Susanne returned to Allertonville, Major Bryant came with them. Camille was as sweet as a girl when she entered her home and presented the stately, handsome



Digitized by Google

man to her sister Hélène. It was understood that Hélène had returned from her mysterious trip the week before. Hélène made her sister's lover very welcome.

"We are to be married in October," Camille confided to her that night. Then she added, with a pitiful little cry, as if pleading for happiness: "Oh, Hélène, do you think I am very silly?"

"You are not at all silly, dear," said Hélène. "You would be very silly indeed if you did not take all the good that life offers you. It would be like sulking to refuse because it came late."

"Don't you think he is a charming man?" whispered Camille. Camille's silvery hair curled when unloosened. It curled now all around her face, concealing whatever was shrunken in its contours. Her head, rising out of great frills of lace, looked lovely in the candle-light. She eyed like a child her slender left hand, upon the third finger of which a great pearl set in diamonds gleamed. Both sisters were in Camille's chamber, which was a pretty room, all frilled with a rose-patterned chintz.

Hélène laughed. "I think he is very charming, dear," she replied, in her slightly bantering tone. But suddenly Camille eyed her anxiously.



Digitized by Google

"Oh, Hélène, what is it?" she cried.

"What do you mean, dear?" asked Hélène, quietly.

"You are ill. You look bad. I have been so selfish over my own affairs; I have noticed it before. What is it, Hélène?"

"Nothing, dear, except that I am ill, I think."

"Is it—serious?"

"I think so. There, there, Camille dear, don't let your tardy joy be dimmed by this. These things have to come to us all."

"You are not—" sobbed Camille.

"Yes, dear, I think I am going to die before very long, but I hope I am not wicked to be happy about it. You, now you have a lover, dear, can understand how I have missed mine all these years."

"Oh, Hélène, what is it? Do you suffer?"

"Not at all. Do not worry, sweet."

"It is not—not near?"

"I dare say not; don't worry, Camille. Think how happy you are yourself."

"You may live for years?" gasped Camille.

"Yes, I may, dear. I may outlive you all. Nobody knows. What do the medical men know?"



Digitized by Google

"I suppose it is that old trouble about your heart?"

"Yes," replied Hélène, in a short-breathed voice. "Don't worry, dear. When I said I thought it would be soon I dare say I spoke at random. I only have thought that perhaps —it would be best for you to be prepared in case— But now you have this good man to take care of you and manage everything I shall be relieved of so much, and shall be so happy I may indeed live years."

"You have had too much care; I know you have," sobbed Camille.

"I was the only one of us all who could add a column straight," laughed Hélène. "I had to do what I could. Now your Major can keep the accounts. I shall lie back and rest."

"And it may be years?"

"Yes, it may be years." Hélène's short-breathed voice had the sweetest of falling cadences. She bent over her sister and kissed her and whispered in her ear. "I am glad that joy on earth has come to one of us," she whispered, and went out, and Camille never saw her again alive.

The next morning Hélène did not appear, and she was found lying quietly in her white-



Digitized by Google

draped bed. She did not answer nor move when she was called, but lay in the greatest silence of all, with smiling, upturned face.

It was two months after the funeral, and after Camille's marriage to Major Bryant, that Hélène's journal was read. The last entry is quoted herein. Hélène wrote thus: "I have a confession to make. I may be thought even by those who love me best and hold me in best repute to have been guilty of untruth. I myself do not think that I have been, but it may be that I do not see clearly the right and wrong, being blinded by love. When I have stated, all these years, that I myself was upon a journey while my dear sisters were away, I have so considered, although I have never left this house in which I write, and the servants have known and have kept my secret. I have considered that I have never for one instant stayed my progress toward the great goal of all born of woman. You, Camille and Susanne, have as it were simply passed into another car of the train which bears us all forward past the scenes of earth to eternity. I have remained in my own place, and yet in one sense have I also not remained in my place. I myself went backward in the train when you went forward,



Digitized by Google

Every solitary summer I returned to my sweet past. My old days of romance were my resort of rest for body and soul. I have made every day, while you were away, a day of my lost youth. By long dwelling upon that which is gone I have been enabled to bring it to a semblance of life. As truly as I write this do I believe that this very summer, while you have been absent, I have spent whole days with my beloved and lived over old and exquisite experiences. I have dressed my hair for my lover, I have worn the gowns and ornaments he used to like, and, as God is my witness, I have seemed to see my own face of youth in my glass after many a happy day. I have travelled farther than most, for I have returned while yet in the flesh to the lost land of youth, and I have also gone forward, but of that I do not speak.

"And now I have still another confession to make. Aunt Hélène's legacy consisted only of the sum sufficient to pay your expenses this summer. She had spent all besides. In this, too, I deceived you because I loved you—for your happiness. I myself believe that deceit for the sake of love may be truth in the highest, but, if it be not so, then I have to crave forgiveness from love."



Digitized by Google

The journal of Hélène Allerton closed with verses which were used as her epitaph, and were doubtless so designed to be used by herself, and they ran in this wise:

"Here lies beneath this solemn stone
One who has travelled far and wide
With painful steps, but made no moan,
Since Love was always by her side.

"But now she hails the blessed night
When she may lay her down to sleep
Through sun or storm or fruit or blight,
With Love her happy soul to keep."

Digitized by Google

# HER CHRISTMAS

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# HER CHRISTMAS

GRACE MAYBE looked happily at the stocking stuffed bunchily from toe to top, hanging beside the open fireplace, then at Flora Greenway. "Yes," said she, "it is crammed full. Little Grace will be so tickled she won't know what to do."

Flora laughed pleasantly. "I wish I could see her when she takes the presents out," said she. Flora was a large, plain girl, with a sweet expression and a high, benevolent forehead. She was engaged to be married to Grace's brother-in-law, Oliver Maybe. She taught school for her living and supported her orphan niece, little Annie Greenway.

"I do wish you could see her take the presents out," said Grace; "but I expect she will be up by dawn."

"Too early for me," laughed Flora, "and



Digitized by Google

you know I have to see to Annie's Christmas stocking, too, dear."

"So you have."

Flora looked at the stocking, which was capped with a sprig of holly. "I have some holly, too," said she. "Annie has hung her stocking, and I have a sprig of holly on top."

"I had to use one of my own stockings," said Grace. "Little Grace's would not have begun to hold the things. She really has almost too nice and expensive presents this year. There are a little gold ring with a tiny pearl from her aunt Emma, and a gold locket and chain from her uncle Oliver, and her grandma Maybe sent her a lovely coral string, and her grandpa a five-dollar gold piece. Then the doll I have been dressing for her will have to sit on the floor under the stocking. Of course, that will not go in, and her father is going to bring home a sled to-night, and a doll's house."

"You will spoil her," said Flora. Then she added, hastily: "But you can't, dear, I know. She is such a darling. You can't spoil such a child as little Grace, and I can't spoil my Annie!"

"What have you got for Annie?"



Digitized by Google

Flora colored. "I could not buy her much except necessary things," said she; "but I have dressed a doll, and I found a real cunning set of china dishes for a quarter at Simmons'. She won't know the difference."

Grace rose hastily. "Wait a minute, dear," she said. "I have a box of candy and a game I want to give you to put in Annie's stocking."

"You are very kind," Flora said, gratefully.

"I have them all ready, tied up with ribbons," said Grace. "They are in my room; I will bring them right down."

When Grace came back, trailing her blue tea-gown, she had her hands full. "Here, dear," she said. "I want you to take this box of handkerchiefs, and this boy doll, too. I got them for little Grace, but they simply will not go into the stocking, and she has enough as it is."

Flora was standing at the window as Grace entered. She was looking at a stand of geraniums in blossom. The shade was up, and one could see outside the snowy landscape and the full moon overhead. Flora had put on her old fur-lined cloak while Grace was out of the room. She turned with it wrapped



Digitized by Google

around her, and extended a hand for Grace's gifts, and thanked her sweetly.

"Annie will be so pleased," she said, "and, to tell you the truth, I have been feeling rather sad all day because I had so little to put in the dear child's stocking. You know I have hard work to make both ends meet."

"I know," said Grace, sympathetically. "What made you put your cloak on, dear? Isn't the room warm enough?"

"Oh yes, but I really must go. I don't feel quite easy about leaving Annie alone in the house any longer."

"Why, Flora, aren't you going to wait for Oliver? He must be home before long now. The Masons' meetings never last much after ten."

"No, I don't think I can."

"I expect Joe, too, every minute. He will go home with you."

"No, I think I had better not wait, really, Grace."

All this time Grace had been standing with her back toward the fireplace. "Aren't you afraid?" she asked, anxiously.

Flora laughed. "Afraid on the village street in broad moonlight! Why, it is as light as



Digitized by Google

day," she answered, "and it is such a short distance, anyway. Tell Oliver that I am sorry not to see him, but I felt that I ought not to wait."

Grace went to the door with Flora, and afterward stood at the window behind the stand of geraniums, watching her hurry down the street. The street and sidewalk, hard packed with snow, gleamed like a track of silver. Flora's dark figure, bulging at one side with the parcels which she carried under her fur-lined cloak, was clearly outlined until she passed out of sight. She lived about half a mile down the street.

Then Grace turned around, and her eyes instinctively sought the Christmas stocking—her dear little daughter's Christmas stocking. It was not there. Grace stared, bewildered. She rubbed her eyes. It seemed to her that she must be mistaken—that the stocking must be there. She went over to the fireplace and actually felt of the brass hook on which the bellows usually hung and on which the stocking had been suspended, and there was absolutely nothing there. "It can't be that I feel wrong as well as see wrong," Grace said, aloud, in a stupid fashion. She



Digitized by Google

stood quite still, staring. She was dazed. She had gone up-stairs, leaving her dearest friend and her sister-to-be in the room with that Christmas stocking. Now her friend was gone, and the stocking was gone. Her mind refused to grasp the facts.

Finally she sat down beside the hearth and tried to think, to reason out the matter, but it was all in vain. It was like trying to solve an algebraical problem not fairly stated. The premises were all awry. There was no solution in reason. Grace thought blindly of Maggie, the one servant in the house. Maggie was honest beyond question, and, moreover, Maggie could prove an alibi. Maggie was not in the house, had not been in the house since noon. However, Grace went up-stairs to Maggie's room, to find it empty, and Maggie's feathered hat, which always decorated her dresser when not afield, was missing. On her way down-stairs Grace peeped into little Grace's room. Little Grace's room was separated by a narrow closet from her parents' apartment and was a rosy nest, with wall-paper strewn with garlands of rosebuds, the daintiest white furniture painted with a charming rose design, white muslin curtains tied with pink ribbons,



Digitized by Google

and a rose-patterned rug by the white bed. In this bed lay little Grace, as pink and sweet as a rose herself, with her tangle of curly brown hair, and her closed eyes with long dark fringes against her flushed cheeks.

"The little precious," murmured Grace. Then she thought with dismay how disappointed the darling would be when she did not find the stocking which she had hung with such innocent faith before she had gone to bed. Of course there would be the big doll and the sled and the doll's house, but none of them would go into a stocking. What would poor little Grace do?

When Grace went down-stairs she heard a click in the lock of the front door, and knew with a throb of relief that Joe, her husband, had come. When the door was open she flung herself toward him with a hysterical sob. Joe Maybe, who was a large, happy-faced young man in a fur-lined coat, carefully set some packages on the floor, then turned his attention to his wife. "Why, Grace dear," he asked, anxiously, "what is the matter?"

"Little Grace's stocking has gone," Grace sobbed.

"Gone?"

"Yes, go—ne!"



Digitized by Google

"Where?"

"Don't be a goose. If I knew where, do you think I would be so upset?"

"But where?" asked Joe, inconsequently, again.

"Joe Maybe, if you ask where again you'll drive me raving mad."

Then Joe said nothing at all. He stood staring stupidly at his wife, who spoke stammeringly, giving the facts—the utterly unreasonable, impossible facts.

When she had done, Joe continued to stare for a second. Then he said, "Sure the stocking was there?"

"Joe Maybe, are you losing your wits? Didn't you help me fill that stocking before you went down street?"

"So I did. Are you sure you didn't take it away—hang it somewhere else?"

"I know I did not."

"Where is Maggie?" then asked Joe, feebly.

"I gave her an afternoon out. She went away right after luncheon, and has not been home since."

"How long were you out of the room?"

"Perhaps ten minutes—no longer."

"And Flora was there when you went upstairs?"



Digitized by Google

"Joe Maybe!"

Joe flushed angrily. "You don't think that I think—" he spluttered.

"I hope you aren't quite such a fool, Joe Maybe."

"I don't believe, for my part, that the stocking was there when you went out," declared Joe, with an air of sudden wise decision.

"Joe Maybe, don't you believe I can see with my own eyes?"

"I think you sometimes get rattled."

Then Grace waxed indignant. "I dare say you think I am rattled now," said she. "Perhaps you think the stocking is there, after all."

Suddenly Grace seized her husband by his huge fur-clad shoulders and gave him a twist toward the open library door. From where they stood the fireplace was distinctly visible. "Look!" said she, imperiously.

"It ain't there," admitted Joe, relapsing into the vernacular of his boyhood through consternation.

Then Grace committed the very error for which she had chidden her husband. "Where is it?" she said, helplessly.

"How in creation do you suppose I know?"



Digitized by Google

asked Joe. "Haven't I just come in, and the last thing I saw when I went away was that confounded stocking hanging there, with the sprig of holly on top."

The two stood staring at each other, but Grace was the first to recover a measure of equanimity. "Well, the stocking is gone," said she, with decision, "and that isn't the question now. The question now is how are we to manage so that precious darling shall not have her dear little Christmas spoiled. She must have her stocking filled with something. Of course we can't replace all those lovely things our relatives have sent her, but it must be stuffed full, Joe Maybe."

"Have you got anything to put in it?" asked Joe.

"Not a thing except a box of candy. I gave everything I had left over to Flora for Annie." Both Grace's and Joe's face contracted as with an unspoken, uneasy thought at the mention of Flora. "Are all the stores shut?" asked Grace.

"Simmons' wasn't when I left, and I dare say if I hurry it won't be before I get back there."

Grace gave him a push. "Then hurry just



Digitized by Google

as fast as you can!" she cried. "Get anything to fill a stocking. Get games, boxes of children's paper, balls, kaleidoscopes—anything. Run just as fast as ever you can, Joe Maybe!"

Joe was fairly pushed out the door, and he raced down the moonlit street with his head in a whirl like the very kaleidoscope which his wife had mentioned. All sorts of toys of childhood seemed revolving before his mental vision, making endless queer and bewildering combinations.

Meantime Grace went up-stairs and got the mate to the missing stocking, and brought it down. Then she sat waiting for Joe's return. Again she tried to bring reason out of the unreasonable situation, and again her mind labored in vain. Then Oliver, her husband's brother, came in and found her sitting there. He glanced first at her, then at the fireplace.

"Hullo!" said he, "where's Flora? What on earth is the matter, Grace? Where is the kid's stocking?" The three questions were fired very rapidly at Grace, and she answered the last first.

"It has disappeared," said she, in an embarrassed fashion.

At first Oliver laughed. "Disappeared!" he



Digitized by Google

echoed. "What! did Santa Claus take a notion to give it to another kid? What do you mean?"

"What I say," repeated Grace. "It has disappeared."

"Disappeared! I never heard of such a thing. What do you mean?"

"What I say. I left it hanging there, and went up-stairs for something, and when I returned that stocking had disappeared."

"Who was in the house? Had anybody come into the room? Was the front door unlocked?" Oliver Maybe had a curious manner of putting questions in bunches.

Grace answered the last question and ignored the others.

"No," said she.

Oliver whistled. "It beats anything I ever heard," said he. "Where's Flora? I thought she was coming over."

"She did come, and went home. She left word that she was sorry, but thought she ought not to wait any longer and leave Annie alone."

"I think she might have waited," said Oliver. His face scowled slightly. He looked like his brother, but he had a nervous temperament and was not always so good-natured. "What



Digitized by Google

did she think of the stocking's disappearance?" he asked.

Grace colored.

"Why don't you answer?"

"I didn't tell her," said Grace, faintly.

"Why not?"

"To tell the truth, I did not know it myself until after she was gone," said Grace.

"I suppose she noticed it hanging there," Oliver said, with a puzzled air.

"Yes; we both talked about it," said Grace, still constrainedly; but Oliver did not notice the constraint.

"Well, what is to be done?" he asked. "It will break that child's heart if she does not have her Christmas stocking."

"Joe has run back to Simmons' to buy some things," said Grace. "Of course, it must be filled."

Oliver took out his wallet, and handed Grace a ten-dollar note. "Sorry I haven't got a gold-piece," said he, "but that will have to do. Tuck it in the toe, Grace."

"When I think of that lovely locket and chain you bought for little Grace, I could cry," said Grace. "Thank you, Oliver. It is too much for you to do."



Digitized by Google

Oliver still scowled. "Oh, that's nothing," said he. "I don't mind that, but it is the queerest thing I ever heard. Did you say the front door was unlocked?"

Grace did not reply at once.

"Was it?" persisted Oliver.

"I think it was unlocked," Grace replied, faintly.

Then Oliver jumped up.

"Good Lord, Grace!" he cried. "Don't you see what it means, then? There was a sneak-thief in the house—he must have got in while we were at supper. I know the front door wasn't locked then, for I was the first to go out, and I remember it was unlocked. Why, Grace, he must be in the house now, unless he had a chance to steal out while Joe was here!"

Grace began to look pale. "He couldn't possibly," she gasped. "Oh, Oliver, do you think—?"

"Why, there must be! Here, give me that lamp. You stay here."

But Grace had spirit. "No, you are not going a step without me," she declared. "But do be as still as you can. I don't want little Grace frightened—she is so nervous. If there should be a man, don't you think you can make him be quiet, Oliver?"



Digitized by Google

"I rather think I can," Oliver said, grimly. He strode out into the hall with the lamp, Grace at his heels. Then he got a stout walking-stick from the stand, and he and Grace searched the whole house. They even went down cellar, and up in the attic, but there was no sneak-thief. They peeped into little Grace's rosy nest, and she still lay seemingly fast asleep, with the brown tangle of silky hair over her rosy cheeks. "Bless her heart," whispered Oliver, who adored his niece.

When they were back in the library they looked at each other. Grace's eyes fell before her brother-in-law's. "What do you make of it?" asked Oliver, crossly. Grace shook her head.

Then they heard Joe at the front door, and Grace ran to admit him. Joe's arms were full of parcels.

"I got there just as they were closing," he panted. "I was just in time. Guess I've got enough to fill the stocking."

"What do you make of it, anyway, Joe?" Oliver asked, still crossly.

"Hush, for goodness' sake!" whispered Grace, taking some of the parcels from her husband's hands. "You will wake up little Grace."



Digitized by Google

And they hushed; but there was really no need whatever for caution, for little Grace was quite wide awake, and had been all the time. She was awake, and very conscience-stricken. Little Grace Maybe might have been cited at that time as a good example of the unwisdom of telling children about Santa Claus, since she had been thereby led into deceit and the worst naughtiness of which she had ever been guilty. Little Grace had always been called a very good girl, quite a pattern for other children. She was naturally obedient and loving and truthful, but now she had fallen from grace and bumped her spiritual forehead and sadly skinned her spiritual knees. And it had all come to pass through her entire belief in Santa Claus. That afternoon she had been permitted to go over and visit Minnie Anderson, who lived next door, and who, coming from German stock, was quite filled with Christmas lore. The two children had been left alone together while Minnie's mother dressed her Christmas doll, and they talked. And Minnie had filled little Grace's head with dire misgivings. "If," Minnie had said, "you have not been a real good girl all the year you will have a bundle of sticks in-



Digitized by Google

stead of presents in your stocking." And little Grace had tried very hard to remember whether she had or had not been good all the year. Once, she admitted, when pressed by Minnie's questioning, she had been guilty of helping herself to a spoonful of jelly without her mother's knowledge, and once she had cried when her mother would not let her go to the store with her. Minnie was of the opinion that these two misdemeanors might have caused little Grace to lose her chance of Christmas presents. She, Minnie, could not remember anything as bad of which she had been guilty. It, therefore, ended in little Grace's returning home in a very doleful state of mind, and hanging her stocking with a hopeless feeling that she had much better not. She had not fallen asleep, but had lain awake, thinking, and out of her thoughts arose finally a tiny flame of resentment and rebellion. She did not think that she had been so very naughty because she had taken just one spoonful of jelly, and she had wanted very much to go to the store that time when she had cried. It began to seem to little Grace that the loss of Christmas presents and the substitution of a bundle of sticks was entirely too severe a penalty



Digitized by Google

for such little sins. She accordingly began to consider how she could circumvent her hard fate. She had heard her mother come up-stairs. She had not known that her aunt Flora, as she had been taught to call her, was in the library. She had stolen down-stairs, and she had started at the sight of Flora; but when she had seen that she did not notice her, she had slipped across the room and stolen her own Christmas stocking and fled up the back stairs and gotten back into bed. She was hugging the stocking close when her mother peeped in at her the first time. The second time she had it hidden away at the bottom of her doll's trunk, which stood at the foot of her bed.

When little Grace's father and mother came up for the night and peeped lovingly in at her for the third time, and her mother gave her rose-sprinkled silk quilt a tender tuck; when she heard them whispering in the next room and knew quite well they were discussing the disappearance of the stocking—little Grace realized in her child's heart the emotions of one who had lived long in the world. She had come suddenly into a knowledge of deceit and wrong-doing for the sake of her own selfish ends which aged her,



Digitized by Google

poor child! She lay awake a long time, and was very unhappy and at the same time defiant. Then she became so sleepy that her unhappiness no longer stung her into wakefulness, and she fell into slumber. She awoke early, and lay for a moment in her usual blissful semi-consciousness of life, which was hardly more than the consciousness of a rose. Then she remembered. It was Christmas morning. There would be no stocking hanging for her beside the chimney-place. There might, indeed, be a bundle of sticks, as Minnie Anderson had prophesied, for where was there another such naughty girl as she? But what else could there be? It was a woful face which looked up at Grace Maybe when she came in and wished her one darling a merry Christmas and kissed her.

"Why, sweetheart," she said, lovingly, "how has it happened that you have not been up before now, and down-stairs to see what Santa Claus has brought you?"

"I don't know," murmured little Grace.

Her mother regarded her anxiously. "Why, darling, what is it?" she cried. "Don't you feel well?"

Little Grace's father was standing in the doorway by that time, and looking concerned.



Digitized by Google

"Had I better go for the doctor?" he said. "What ails her, Grace?"

"I don't know. Tell mother what ails you, mother's precious lamb."

Then little Grace began to cry as she had never cried before, shedding such tears as she had never shed before: the tears which came from the horror of wickedness discovered in one's own heart. Grace Maybe did not know what to do. She and Joe looked at each other in dismay, and Joe asked again if he had not better go for the doctor.

Finally Grace soothed little Grace after a fashion, gave her her bath, brushed her hair, and tied it with a red and green ribbon because it was Christmas Day, and fastened her embroidered red dress. Then little Grace was led down-stairs. Her father and mother could not imagine why she hung back and seemed to dread to go. But they were still more aghast when little Grace gave a shrill cry of terror at the sight of the stocking stuffed bulgingly and tipped with a sprig of holly. How in the world had it happened? Her Christmas stocking was up-stairs at the very bottom of her doll's trunk, and yet it was here! It was too much for little Grace, who was a nervous,



Digitized by Google

imaginative child. She turned so pale that her mother laid her on the divan, and Joe, after calling his brother, rushed for the doctor. Little Grace did not faint away, but she began to weep again, and looked so pale and frightened that it was heartbreaking, especially on Christmas morning. Her uncle Oliver stood beside her mother, and looked at her.

"What on earth ails her?" said he. "Coming down with the measles?"

"Of course not, Oliver. She had them only last summer."

"Maybe it's scarlet fever, then," suggested Oliver, cheerfully.

"Oh dear, I hope not," moaned Grace. "It isn't around here."

"Sometimes there are isolated cases, I've heard," said Oliver, wisely. "Seems to me her hands feel rather too warm."

"It can't be," almost sobbed little Grace's mother. "Does your head ache, darling? Where do you feel bad, sweetheart?"

"I don't know," panted little Grace, and indeed she did not know, for this world-old pain was quite new to her.

Oliver took the stocking down, and he and little Grace's mother tried to divert her



Digitized by Google

with the contents, but she did not seem to pay any attention. Then the doctor came with Joe.

"I have been trying to have her notice her Christmas presents," Grace said, "but she seems to be all upset over them. See if she is feverish, doctor."

The doctor, who was quite old and very stout, breathed wheezily and felt little Grace's pulse, with spectacled eyes upon his big gold watch. Little Grace grew paler. She had a terrified conviction that the doctor and his watch between them would surely find out what the real trouble was. The doctor's first words confirmed her. He turned and looked sharply at her mother, then at her father.

"Has this child had any shock to her nerves lately?" he asked.

Grace Maybe gasped, and so did Joe.

"Why, not that we know of," replied Grace, and Joe echoed his wife.

"Not that we know of," said he.

Then the doctor turned his sharp eyes upon little Grace. "Anything scared you lately?" said he. "Seen a mouse or anything?"

"No, thir," answered little Grace, feebly.

"Is it scarlet fever, doctor?" asked Uncle Oliver.



Digitized by Google

"Scarlet fiddlesticks," replied the doctor, shortly. "This child has seen a bugaboo. There's nothing the matter with her. She is one of the kind of children who see bugaboos. It is time you stopped seeing bugaboos," he said to little Grace directly, and she trembled and said, "Yeth, thir."

"Mind you do," said the doctor. "The very best thing you can do if she sees another," he told little Grace's mother, "is to give that child a good dose of castor-oil without any lemon to take the taste out, and without any candy afterward. Sometimes castor-oil works like a charm. It drives away a bugaboo better than anything else." The doctor's mouth, although his tone was very stern, twitched at the corners, and his eyes twinkled. However, out in the hall, with the library door closed, he spoke seriously to little Grace's parents. "She is a very peculiar child," said the doctor, and Joe and Grace looked rather proud, also alarmed.

"She is nervous and sensitive to a very marked degree," said the doctor. "It seems absurd, but *has* she anything on her mind?"

Then Joe and Grace stared.

"Anything on her mind?" said Joe.



Digitized by Google

"Anything on that blessed child's mind?" said Grace.

The doctor shook his head. "Sometimes children, especially children of her type, get queer fancies into their heads," he said. "Keep her quiet. Don't attempt to force even her Christmas presents upon her if she seems disturbed. Keep her quiet, and the castor-oil won't do any harm, anyway."

Events developed rapidly that Christmas Day. Suddenly Uncle Oliver became aware of the true significance of the situation. It was after luncheon. The Christmas dinner was to be eaten at seven o'clock. Grace had taken little Grace up-stairs, and was trying to divert her by reading a story. Joe and his brother were alone in the library, when Oliver turned and said:

"Great Scott! Joe, you don't think—"

"No, old man, I don't think!" Joe cried, hotly, but he colored.

"Then you are trying not to think, you and Grace. You can't deny that. Why, Joe, Flora! Flora! the thing is *monstrous!*"

"Of course it is. We don't—"

"But you are trying not to. Flora was alone in the room with that miserable stock-



Digitized by Google

ing when Grace went up-stairs. You and Grace have let that much out, and—" Oliver jumped up and began pacing the room.

"Now, see here, Oliver," Joe said. "We might just as well talk this over reasonably, now that you have begun. Neither Grace nor I actually thinks Flora took that stocking, and, what is more, we never shall think so, but here are the facts." Then Joe told in a few words the story of Flora, Annie, and the fur-lined cloak.

"You do think so, you and Grace!" Oliver said, furiously.

"I tell you, Oliver, we don't think so."

"Everything points that way. You do think so. Flora shall not come here for Christmas dinner." (Flora and Annie had been invited to dinner.) "I will go straight over and tell her not to come. She shall not enter a house where she has been so insulted, not while I have any influence with her."

Then Oliver rushed out of the room, and thrust himself into his coat, and strode down the snowy road. Grace heard the commotion and came running down to the library, and Joe told her what had happened. Grace began to cry.



Digitized by Google

"It is perfectly awful," she said. "I never knew such an awful Christmas. Of course, poor dear Flora didn't take that stocking."

"I wouldn't believe it if I saw her with it," declared Joe.

"Neither would I. But she is sure to feel that we *do* suspect her, and Oliver will only make a bad matter worse—he is so hot-headed—and Flora and Annie won't come to dinner, and little Grace scares me, she acts so strange. But I simply will not give that dear child castor-oil. I don't care what the doctor said. He is a brute."

"How does little Grace seem now?" asked Joe, anxiously.

"She is just as pale as can be, and you know she wouldn't eat any luncheon, and she acts scared whenever I say anything about her Christmas presents, and every now and then she begins to cry, and she won't tell me what the matter is." Poor Grace began to weep herself. "I never saw such an awful Christmas," she said. "Oh, Joe, what do you think of it all?"

"I don't know," Joe replied, gloomily. "But don't you cry and make yourself ill, dear."



Digitized by Google

"Flora will never set her foot in this house again," sobbed Grace, "after Oliver tells her. Oh, I wish he had stayed at home! She will never come here again, and then when Oliver marries her he will never come. It is perfectly dreadful."

"You go too fast, dear," said Joe, consolingly. "Perhaps she will come. Flora is very sensible."

"No, she will not," sobbed Grace.

But Grace was wrong. At half-past six Flora, Oliver, and little Annie appeared. Flora kissed Grace warmly. Then she laughed, although there were tears in her eyes.

"Grace darling," said Flora, "I know just how queer this whole affair looks, but I do know that neither you nor Joe, after knowing me all these years, can possibly think—"

"Flora," said Joe, with a great sigh of relief, "you are the most sensible girl I ever knew in my whole life."

As for Grace, she hugged and kissed Flora, and she hugged and kissed Annie, who was a blonde morsel of a girl in a white coat and white leggings and a white hood, with one yellow curl carefully tucked outside on either cheek.



Digitized by Google

But Oliver still looked sulky. "Well, Flora has talked me over," he said, "and I suppose she is right. You can't possibly suspect her."

"Of course we can't," came in an emphatic duet from Grace and Joe.

"But," Oliver went on, "all the same I don't like such mysteries, and I want to know what did become of that stocking. I want this cleared up."

They had all been in the hall, talking, and now a weak little voice came from the head of the stairs, "Mamma!"

Grace turned quickly. "What is it, darling?" she asked. "The poor child has been so sick all day we had to call in the doctor," she explained hurriedly to Flora, then went up-stairs, calling anxiously all the way: "What is it, precious? Don't you feel well?"

The others went into the library. They heard a door close overhead, then an exclamation, then a sound of sobbing.

"I should think everybody had lost their wits this particular Christmas," Oliver said, irritably. "What on earth is the matter now?"

"Don't, Oliver dear," said Flora. "Perhaps the poor child is sick."



Digitized by Google

"WHERE DID THAT STOCKING COME FROM?" GASPED JOE

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

"No more sick than I am," said Oliver. "She is fretting about something."

Flora went to the foot of the stairs and called to know if she could do anything; and Grace's voice, which sounded excited and agitated, replied, "No, dear; little Grace and I are coming right down."

Flora removed Annie's coat and leggings and hood, and she appeared in a white embroidered frock, with a big blue bow on the top of her yellow head. Annie sat down obediently and remained very quiet, as did they all. Everybody in the room had a premonition of an approaching sensation. Presently it arrived. Grace Maybe entered, and after her little Grace in her red Christmas frock with her red and green bow on her brown head, and she carried in each hand a well-filled stocking. Everybody except Annie, who sat still and smiled innocently, sprang up and stared. "What—" began Oliver.

"Where did that stocking come from?" gasped Joe.

"Tell them, little Grace," said Grace, and she patted the brown head with infinite tenderness and pity.

Then little Grace told her story with her



Digitized by Google

charming lisp. When she had finished, her mother said: "And now little Grace is very sorry that she did such a naughty thing as to come down-stairs and take her own Christmas stocking before Christmas morning and make everybody so much trouble, aren't you, dear?"

"Yeth, 'm," replied little Grace. Her eyes were still red with tears, although they had been well bathed with cold water, but her lips were smiling happily.

Joe stood staring, his face in a broad grin. "Poor little duck! So she thought Santa Claus wasn't going to give her anything this year, and planned to get ahead of him?" said he.

"Hush, Joe, do," whispered Grace.

Oliver stood looking out of the window over the geranium plants, and he was shaking with subdued laughter. Flora was beside him, her hand on his arm. She also was laughing quietly. Annie sat and smiled. She smiled more when little Grace gave her the second Christmas stocking.

"Thith ith for you, becauth Thanta Clauth did not mean to give me more than one," said she.



Digitized by Google

There was an irrepressible chuckle from Oliver.

"Oliver," said Grace, "why don't you and Flora go into the parlor and let the children have this room to play in? I have to go out and see about dinner, and I want Joe to take the turkey out of the oven. I am afraid Maggie will drop it. She has a lame arm."

Left alone in the library, the two small girls sat on the floor and explored their stockings.

"Did you think you wouldn't have any presents?" asked Annie, in the softest of voices.

"Yeth," replied little Grace. Then she looked wistfully at Annie. "If I tell you something, won't you ever tell, honetht?" she said.

"No, I never will," said Annie, surveying her with great blue eyes.

"I hadn't ever been real naughty before, and that scared me," whispered little Grace; "but that wathen't all. You won't ever tell, will you?"

Annie nodded emphatically.

"When I thaw those two stockings I thought Thanta Clauth wath crathy," whispered little Grace, "but now I've found out there ithen't any Thanta Clauth. He'th just your own folks."



Digitized by Google

"I've known that ever since I was born," said Annie, and she smiled a smile full of the wisdom of innocence at the other little girl.

"I am thorry I didn't alwath know he wath my folks," said little Grace, "becauth if he wath there wathen't any need for me to take the stocking."

Digitized by Google

# OLD WOMAN MAGOUN

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# OLD WOMAN MAGOUN

THE hamlet of Barry's Ford is situated in a sort of high valley among the mountains. Below it the hills lie in moveless curves like a petrified ocean; above it they rise in green-cresting waves which never break. It is *Barry's* Ford because at one time the Barry family was the most important in the place; and *Ford* because just at the beginning of the hamlet the little turbulent Barry River is fordable. There is, however, now a rude bridge across the river.

Old Woman Magoun was largely instrumental in bringing the bridge to pass. She haunted the miserable little grocery, wherein whiskey and hands of tobacco were the most salient features of the stock in trade, and she talked much. She would elbow herself into the midst of a knot of idlers and talk.



Digitized by Google

"That bridge ought to be built this very summer," said Old Woman Magoun. She spread her strong arms like wings, and sent the loafers, half laughing, half angry, flying in every direction. "If I were a *man*," said she, "I'd go out this very minute and lay the fust log. If I were a passel of lazy men layin' round, I'd start up for once in my life, I would." The men cowered visibly—all except Nelson Barry; he swore under his breath and strode over to the counter.

Old Woman Magoun looked after him majestically. "You can cuss all you want to, Nelson Barry," said she; "I ain't afraid of you. I don't expect you to lay ary log of the bridge, but I'm goin' to have it built this very summer." She did. The weakness of the masculine element in Barry's Ford was laid low before such strenuous feminine assertion.

Old Woman Magoun and some other women planned a treat—two sucking pigs, and pies, and sweet cake—for a reward after the bridge should be finished. They even viewed leniently the increased consumption of ardent spirits.

"It seems queer to me," Old Woman Magoun said to Sally Jinks, "that men can't do nothin' without havin' to drink and chew to keep their



Digitized by Google

"MEN IS DIFFERENT," SAID SALLY JINKS

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

sperits up. Lord! I've worked all my life and never done nuther."

"Men is different," said Sally Jinks.

"Yes, they be," assented Old Woman Magoun, with open contempt.

The two women sat on a bench in front of Old Woman Magoun's house, and little Lily Barry, her granddaughter, sat holding her doll on a small mossy stone near by. From where they sat they could see the men at work on the new bridge. It was the last day of the work.

Lily clasped her doll—a poor old rag thing—close to her childish bosom, like a little mother, and her face, round which curled her long yellow hair, was fixed upon the men at work. Little Lily had never been allowed to run with the other children of Barry's Ford. Her grandmother had taught her everything she knew—which was not much, but tending at least to a certain measure of spiritual growth—for she, as it were, poured the goodness of her own soul into this little receptive vase of another. Lily was firmly grounded in her knowledge that it was wrong to lie or steal or disobey her grandmother. She had also learned that one should be very industrious. It was seldom that Lily sat idly holding her doll-baby, but this was a



Digitized by Google

holiday because of the bridge. She looked only a child, although she was nearly fourteen; her mother had been married at sixteen. That is, Old Woman Magoun said that her daughter, Lily's mother, had married at sixteen; there had been rumors, but no one had dared openly gainsay the old woman. She said that her daughter had married Nelson Barry, and he had deserted her. She had lived in her mother's house, and Lily had been born there, and she had died when the baby was only a week old. Lily's father, Nelson Barry, was the fairly dangerous degenerate of a good old family. Nelson's father before him had been bad. He was now the last of the family, with the exception of a sister of feeble intellect, with whom he lived in the old Barry house. He was a middle-aged man, still handsome. The shiftless population of Barry's Ford looked up to him as to an evil deity. They wondered how Old Woman Magoun dared brave him as she did. But Old Woman Magoun had within her a mighty sense of reliance upon herself as being on the right track in the midst of a maze of evil, which gave her courage. Nelson Barry had manifested no interest whatever in his daughter. Lily seldom saw her father. She did not



Digitized by Google

often go to the store which was his favorite haunt. Her grandmother took care that she should not do so.

However, that afternoon she departed from her usual custom and sent Lily to the store.

She came in from the kitchen, whither she had been to baste the roasting pig. "There's no use talkin'," said she, "I've got to have some more salt. I've jest used the very last I had to dredge over that pig. I've got to go to the store."

Sally Jinks looked at Lily. "Why don't you send her?" she asked.

Old Woman Magoun gazed irresolutely at the girl. She was herself very tired. It did not seem to her that she could drag herself up the dusty hill to the store. She glanced with covert resentment at Sally Jinks. She thought that she might offer to go. But Sally Jinks said again, "Why don't you let her go?" and looked with a languid eye at Lily holding her doll on the stone.

Lily was watching the men at work on the bridge, with her childish delight in a spectacle of any kind, when her grandmother addressed her.

"Guess I'll let you go down to the store an' git some salt, Lily," said she.



Digitized by Google

The girl turned uncomprehending eyes upon her grandmother at the sound of her voice. She had been filled with one of the innocent reveries of childhood. Lily had in her the making of an artist or a poet. Her prolonged childhood went to prove it, and also her retrospective eyes, as clear and blue as blue light itself, which seemed to see past all that she looked upon. She had not come of the old Barry family for nothing. The best of the strain was in her, along with the splendid stanchness in humble lines which she had acquired from her grandmother.

"Put on your hat," said Old Woman Magoun; "the sun is hot, and you might git a headache." She called the girl to her, and put back the shower of fair curls under the rubber band which confined the hat. She gave Lily some money, and watched her knot it into a corner of her little cotton handkerchief. "Be careful you don't lose it," said she, "and don't stop to talk to anybody, for I am in a hurry for that salt. Of course, if anybody speaks to you answer them polite, and then come right along."

Lily started, her pocket-handkerchief weighted with the small silver dangling from one



Digitized by Google

hand, and her rag doll carried over her shoulder like a baby. The absurd travesty of a face peeped forth from Lily's yellow curls. Sally Jinks looked after her with a sniff.

"She ain't goin' to carry that rag doll to the store?" said she.

"She likes to," replied Old Woman Magoun, in a half-shamed yet defiantly extenuating voice.

"Some girls at her age is thinkin' about beaux instead of rag dolls," said Sally Jinks.

The grandmother bristled, "Lily ain't big nor old for her age," said she. "I ain't in any hurry to have her git married. She ain't none too strong."

"She's got a good color," said Sally Jinks. She was crocheting white cotton lace, making her thick fingers fly. She really knew how to do scarcely anything except to crochet that coarse lace; somehow her heavy brain or her fingers had mastered that.

"I know she's got a beautiful color," replied Old Woman Magoun, with an odd mixture of pride and anxiety, "but it comes an' goes."

"I've heard that was a bad sign," remarked Sally Jinks, loosening some thread from her spool.



Digitized by Google

"Yes, it is," said the grandmother. "She's nothin' but a baby, though she's quicker than most to learn."

Lily Barry went on her way to the store. She was clad in a scanty short frock of blue cotton; her hat was tipped back, forming an oval frame for her innocent face. She was very small, and walked like a child, with the clap-clap of little feet of babyhood. She might have been considered, from her looks, under ten.

Presently she heard footsteps behind her; she turned around a little timidly to see who was coming. When she saw a handsome, well-dressed man, she felt reassured. The man came alongside and glanced down carelessly at first, then his look deepened. He smiled, and Lily saw he was very handsome indeed, and that his smile was not only reassuring but wonderfully sweet and compelling.

"Well, little one," said the man, "where are you bound, you and your dolly?"

"I am going to the store to buy some salt for grandma," replied Lily, in her sweet treble. She looked up in the man's face, and he fairly started at the revelation of its innocent beauty. He regulated his pace by hers, and the two went



Digitized by Google

on together. The man did not speak again at once. Lily kept glancing timidly up at him, and every time that she did so the man smiled and her confidence increased. Presently when the man's hand grasped her little childish one hanging by her side, she felt a complete trust in him. Then she smiled up at him. She felt glad that this nice man had come along, for just here the road was lonely.

After a while the man spoke. "What is your name, little one?" he asked, caressingly.

"Lily Barry."

The man started. "What is your father's name?"

"Nelson Barry," replied Lily.

The man whistled. "Is your mother dead?"

"Yes, sir."

"How old are you, my dear?"

"Fourteen," replied Lily.

The man looked at her with surprise. "As old as that?"

Lily suddenly shrank from the man. She could not have told why. She pulled her little hand from his, and he let it go with no remonstrance. She clasped both her arms around her rag doll, in order that her hand should not be free for him to grasp again.



Digitized by Google

She walked a little farther away from the man, and he looked amused.

"You still play with your doll?" he said, in a soft voice.

"Yes, sir," replied Lily. She quickened her pace and reached the store.

When Lily entered the store, Hiram Gates, the owner, was behind the counter. The only man besides in the store was Nelson Barry. He sat tipping his chair back against the wall; he was half asleep, and his handsome face was bristling with a beard of several days' growth and darkly flushed. He opened his eyes when Lily entered, the strange man following. He brought his chair down on all fours, and he looked at the man—not noticing Lily at all—with a look compounded of defiance and uneasiness.

"Hullo, Jim!" he said.

"Hullo, old man!" returned the stranger.

Lily went over to the counter and asked for the salt, in her pretty little voice. When she had paid for it and was crossing the store, Nelson Barry was on his feet.

"Well, how are you, Lily? It is Lily, isn't it?" he said.

"Yes, sir," replied Lily, faintly.



Digitized by Google

Her father bent down and, for the first time in her life, kissed her, and the whiskey odor of his breath came into her face.

Lily involuntarily started, and shrank away from him. Then she rubbed her mouth violently with her little cotton handkerchief, which she held gathered up with the rag doll.

"Damn it all! I believe she is afraid of me," said Nelson Barry, in a thick voice.

"Looks a little like it," said the other man, laughing.

"It's that damned old woman," said Nelson Barry. Then he smiled again at Lily. "I didn't know what a pretty little daughter I was blessed with," said he, and he softly stroked Lily's pink cheek under her hat.

Now Lily did not shrink from him. Hereditary instincts and nature itself were asserting themselves in the child's innocent, receptive breast.

Nelson Barry looked curiously at Lily. "How old are you, anyway, child?" he asked.

"I'll be fourteen in September," replied Lily.

"But you still play with your doll?" said Barry, laughing kindly down at her.

Lily hugged her doll more tightly, in spite of her father's kind voice. "Yes, sir," she replied.



Digitized by Google

Nelson glanced across at some glass jars filled with sticks of candy. "See here, little Lily, do you like candy?" said he.

"Yes, sir."

"Wait a minute."

Lily waited while her father went over to the counter. Soon he returned with a package of the candy.

"I don't see how you are going to carry so much," he said, smiling. "Suppose you throw away your doll?"

Lily gazed at her father and hugged the doll tightly, and there was all at once in the child's expression something mature. It became the reproach of a woman. Nelson's face sobered.

"Oh, it's all right, Lily," he said; "keep your doll. Here, I guess you can carry this candy under your arm."

Lily could not resist the candy. She obeyed Nelson's instructions for carrying it, and left the store laden. The two men also left, and walked in the opposite direction, talking busily.

When Lily reached home, her grandmother, who was watching for her, spied at once the package of candy.

"What's that?" she asked, sharply.



Digitized by Google

"My father gave it to me," answered Lily, in a faltering voice. Sally regarded her with something like alertness.

"Your father?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Where did you see him?"

"In the store."

"He gave you this candy?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"What did he say?"

"He asked me how old I was, and—"

"And what?"

"I don't know," replied Lily; and it really seemed to her that she did not know, she was so frightened and bewildered by it all, and, more than anything else, by her grandmother's face as she questioned her.

Old Woman Magoun's face was that of one upon whom a long-anticipated blow had fallen. Sally Jinks gazed at her with a sort of stupid alarm.

Old Woman Magoun continued to gaze at her grandchild with that look of terrible solicitude, as if she saw the girl in the clutch of a tiger. "You can't remember what else he said?" she asked, fiercely, and the child began to whimper softly.



Digitized by Google

"No, ma'am," she sobbed. "I—don't know, and—"

"And what? Answer me."

"There was another man there. A real handsome man."

"Did he speak to you?" asked Old Woman Magoun.

"Yes, ma'am; he walked along with me a piece," confessed Lily, with a sob of terror and bewilderment.

"What did *he* say to you?" asked Old Woman Magoun, with a sort of despair.

Lily told, in her little, faltering, frightened voice, all of the conversation which she could recall. It sounded harmless enough, but the look of the realization of a long-expected blow never left her grandmother's face.

The sun was getting low, and the bridge was nearing completion. Soon the workmen would be crowding into the cabin for their promised supper. There became visible in the distance, far up the road, the heavily plodding figure of another woman who had agreed to come and help. Old Woman Magoun turned again to Lily.

"You go right up-stairs to your own chamber now," said she.

"Good land! ain't you goin' to let that poor



Digitized by Google

child stay up and see the fun?" said Sally Jinks.

"You jest mind your own business," said Old Woman Magoun, forcibly, and Sally Jinks shrank. "You go right up there now, Lily," said the grandmother, in a softer tone, "and grandma will bring you up a nice plate of supper."

"When be you goin' to let that girl grow up?" asked Sally Jinks, when Lily had disappeared.

"She'll grow up in the Lord's good time," replied Old Woman Magoun, and there was in her voice something both sad and threatening. Sally Jinks again shrank a little.

Soon the workmen came flocking noisily into the house. Old Woman Magoun and her two helpers served the bountiful supper. Most of the men had drunk as much as, and more than, was good for them, and Old Woman Magoun had stipulated that there was to be no drinking of anything except coffee during supper.

"I'll git you as good a meal as I know how," she said, "but if I see ary one of you drinkin' a drop, I'll run you all out. If you want anything to drink, you can go up to the store afterward. That's the place for you to go to, if you've got to make hogs of yourselves. I ain't goin' to have no hogs in my house."



Digitized by Google

Old Woman Magoun was implicitly obeyed. She had a curious authority over most people when she chose to exercise it. When the supper was in full swing, she quietly stole up-stairs and carried some food to Lily. She found the girl, with the rag doll in her arms, crouching by the window in her little rocking-chair—a relic of her infancy, which she still used.

"What a noise they are makin', grandma!" she said, in a terrified whisper, as her grandmother placed the plate before her on a chair.

"They've 'most all of 'em been drinkin'. They air a passel of hogs," replied the old woman.

"Is the man that was with—with my father down there?" asked Lily, in a timid fashion. Then she fairly cowered before the look in her grandmother's eyes.

"No, he ain't; and what's more, he never will be down there if I can help it," said Old Woman Magoun, in a fierce whisper. "I know who he is. They can't cheat me. He's one of them Willises—that family the Barrys married into. They're worse than the Barrys, ef they *have* got money. Eat your supper, and put him out of your mind, child."

It was after Lily was asleep, when Old



Digitized by Google

Woman Magoun was alone, clearing away her supper dishes, that Lily's father came. The door was closed, and he knocked, and the old woman knew at once who was there. The sound of that knock meant as much to her as the whir of a bomb to the defender of a fortress. She opened the door, and Nelson Barry stood there.

"Good-evening, Mrs. Magoun," he said.

Old Woman Magoun stood before him, filling up the doorway with her firm bulk.

"Good-evening, Mrs. Magoun," said Nelson Barry again.

"I ain't got no time to waste," replied the old woman, harshly. "I've got my supper dishes to clean up after them men."

She stood there and looked at him as she might have looked at a rebellious animal which she was trying to tame. The man laughed.

"It's no use," said he. "You know me of old. No human being can turn me from my way when I am once started in it. You may as well let me come in."

Old Woman Magoun entered the house, and Barry followed her.

Barry began without any preface. "Where is the child?" asked he.



Digitized by Google

"Up-stairs. She has gone to bed."

"She goes to bed early."

"Children ought to," returned the old woman, polishing a plate.

Barry laughed. "You are keeping her a child a long while," he remarked, in a soft voice which had a sting in it.

"She *is* a child," returned the old woman, defiantly.

"Her mother was only three years older when Lily was born."

The old woman made a sudden motion toward the man which seemed fairly menacing. Then she turned again to her dish-washing.

"I want her," said Barry.

"You can't have her," replied the old woman, in a still stern voice.

"I don't see how you can help yourself. You have always acknowledged that she was my child."

The old woman continued her task, but her strong back heaved. Barry regarded her with an entirely pitiless expression.

"I am going to have the girl, that is the long and short of it," he said, "and it is for her best good, too. You are a fool, or you would see it."

"Her best good?" muttered the old woman.



Digitized by Google

"Yes, her best good. What are you going to do with her, anyway? The girl is a beauty, and almost a woman grown, although you try to make out that she is a baby. You can't live forever."

"The Lord will take care of her," replied the old woman, and again she turned and faced him, and her expression was that of a prophetess.

"Very well, let Him," said Barry, easily. "All the same I'm going to have her, and I tell you it is for her best good. Jim Willis saw her this afternoon, and—"

Old Woman Magoun looked at him. "Jim Willis!" she fairly shrieked.

"Well, what of it?"

"One of them Willises!" repeated the old woman, and this time her voice was thick. It seemed almost as if she were stricken with paralysis. She did not enunciate clearly.

The man shrank a little. "Now what is the need of your making such a fuss?" he said. "I will take her, and Isabel will look out for her."

"Your half-witted sister?" said Old Woman Magoun.

"Yes, my half-witted sister. She knows more than you think."

"More wickedness."



Digitized by Google

"Perhaps. Well, a knowledge of evil is a useful thing. How are you going to avoid evil if you don't know what it is like? My sister and I will take care of my daughter."

The old woman continued to look at the man, but his eyes never fell. Suddenly her gaze grew inconceivably keen. It was as if she saw through all externals.

"I know what it is!" she cried. "You have been playing cards and you lost, and this is the way you will pay him."

Then the man's face reddened, and he swore under his breath.

"Oh, my God!" said the old woman; and she really spoke with her eyes aloft as if addressing something outside of them both. Then she turned again to her dish-washing.

The man cast a dogged look at her back. "Well, there is no use talking. I have made up my mind," said he, "and you know me and what that means. I am going to have the girl."

"When?" said the old woman, without turning around.

"Well, I am willing to give you a week. Put her clothes in good order before she comes."

The old woman made no reply. She con-



Digitized by Google

tinued washing dishes. She even handled them so carefully that they did not rattle.

"You understand," said Barry. "Have her ready a week from to-day."

"Yes," said Old Woman Magoun, "I understand."

Nelson Barry, going up the mountain road, reflected that Old Woman Magoun had a strong character, that she understood much better than her sex in general the futility of withstanding the inevitable.

"Well," he said to Jim Willis when he reached home, "the old woman did not make such a fuss as I expected."

"Are you going to have the girl?"

"Yes; a week from to-day. Look here, Jim; you've got to stick to your promise."

"All right," said Willis. "Go you one better."

The two were playing at cards in the old parlor, once magnificent, now squalid, of the Barry house. Isabel, the half-witted sister, entered, bringing some glasses on a tray. She had learned with her feeble intellect some tricks, like a dog. One of them was the mixing of sundry drinks. She set the tray on a little stand near the two men, and watched them with her silly simper.



Digitized by Google

"Clear out now and go to bed," her brother said to her, and she obeyed.

Early the next morning Old Woman Magoun went up to Lily's little sleeping-chamber, and watched her a second as she lay asleep, with her yellow locks spread over the pillow. Then she spoke. "Lily," said she—"Lily, wake up. I am going to Greenham across the new bridge, and you can go with me."

Lily immediately sat up in bed and smiled at her grandmother. Her eyes were still misty, but the light of awakening was in them.

"Get right up," said the old woman. "You can wear your new dress if you want to."

Lily gurgled with pleasure like a baby. "And my new hat?" asked she.

"I don't care."

Old Woman Magoun and Lily started for Greenham before Barry Ford, which kept late hours, was fairly awake. It was three miles to Greenham. The old woman said that, since the horse was a little lame, they would walk. It was a beautiful morning, with a diamond radiance of dew over everything. Her grandmother had curled Lily's hair more punctiliously than usual. The little face peeped like a rose out of two rows of golden spirals. Lily wore her



Digitized by Google

new muslin dress with a pink sash, and her best hat of a fine white straw trimmed with a wreath of rosebuds; also the neatest black open-work stockings and pretty shoes. She even had white cotton gloves. When they set out, the old, heavily stepping woman, in her black gown and cape and bonnet, looked down at the little pink fluttering figure. Her face was full of the tenderest love and admiration, and yet there was something terrible about it. They crossed the new bridge—a primitive structure built of logs in a slovenly fashion. Old Woman Magoun pointed to a gap.

"Jest see that," said she. "That's the way men work."

"Men ain't very nice, be they?" said Lily, in her sweet little voice.

"No, they ain't, take them all together," replied her grandmother.

"That man that walked to the store with me was nicer than some, I guess," Lily said, in a wishful fashion. Her grandmother reached down and took the child's hand in its small cotton glove. "You hurt me, holding my hand so tight," Lily said presently, in a deprecatory little voice.

The old woman loosened her grasp. "Grand-



Digitized by Google

ma didn't know how tight she was holding your hand," said she. "She wouldn't hurt you for nothin', except it was to save your life, or somethin' like that." She spoke with an undertone of tremendous meaning which the girl was too childish to grasp. They walked along the country road. Just before they reached Greenham they passed a stone wall overgrown with blackberry-vines, and, an unsual thing in that vicinity, a lusty spread of deadly nightshade full of berries.

"Those berries look good to eat, grandma," Lily said.

At that instant the old woman's face became something terrible to see. "You can't have any now," she said, and hurried Lily along.

"They look real nice," said Lily.

When they reached Greenham, Old Woman Magoun took her way straight to the most pretentious house there, the residence of the lawyer, whose name was Mason. Old Woman Magoun bade Lily wait in the yard for a few moments, and Lily ventured to seat herself on a bench beneath an oak-tree; then she watched with some wonder her grandmother enter the lawyer's office door at the right of the house. Presently



Digitized by Google

the lawyer's wife came out and spoke to Lily under the tree. She had in her hand a little tray containing a plate of cake, a glass of milk, and an early apple. She spoke very kindly to Lily; she even kissed her, and offered her the tray of refreshments, which Lily accepted gratefully. She sat eating, with Mrs. Mason watching her, when Old Woman Magoun came out of the lawyer's office with a ghastly face.

"What are you eatin'?" she asked Lily, sharply. "Is that a sour apple?"

"I thought she might be hungry," said the lawyer's wife, with loving, melancholy eyes upon the girl.

Lily had almost finished the apple. "It's real sour, but I like it; it's real nice, grandma," she said.

"You ain't been drinkin' milk with a sour apple?"

"It was real nice milk, grandma."

"You ought never to have drunk milk and eat a sour apple," said her grandmother. "Your stomach was all out of order this mornin', an' sour apples and milk is always apt to hurt anybody."

"I don't know but they are," Mrs. Mason said, apologetically, as she stood on the green



Digitized by Google

lawn with her lavender muslin sweeping around her. "I am real sorry, Mrs. Magoun. I ought to have thought. Let me get some soda for her."

"Soda never agrees with her," replied the old woman, in a harsh voice. "Come," she said to Lily, "it's time we were goin' home."

After Lily and her grandmother had disappeared down the road, Lawyer Mason came out of his office and joined his wife, who had seated herself on the bench beneath the tree. She was idle, and her face wore the expression of those who review joys forever past. She had lost a little girl, her only child, years ago, and her husband always knew when she was thinking about her. Lawyer Mason looked older than his wife; he had a dry, shrewd, slightly one-sided face.

"What do you think, Maria?" he said. "That old woman came to me with the most pressing entreaty to adopt that little girl."

"She is a beautiful little girl," said Mrs. Mason, in a slightly husky voice.

"Yes, she is a pretty child," assented the lawyer, looking pityingly at his wife; "but it is out of the question, my dear. Adopting a child is a serious measure, and in this case a child who comes from Barry's Ford."



Digitized by Google

"But the grandmother seems a very good woman," said Mrs. Mason.

"I rather think she is. I never heard a word against her. But the father! No, Maria, we cannot take a child with Barry blood in her veins. The stock has run out; it is vitiated physically and morally. It won't do, my dear."

"Her grandmother had her dressed up as pretty as a little girl could be," said Mrs. Mason, and this time the tears welled into her faithful, wistful eyes.

"Well, we can't help that," said the lawyer, as he went back to his office.

Old Woman Magoun and Lily returned, going slowly along the road to Barry's Ford. When they came to the stone wall where the blackberry-vines and the deadly nightshade grew, Lily said she was tired, and asked if she could not sit down for a few minutes. The strange look on her grandmother's face had deepened. Now and then Lily glanced at her and had a feeling as if she were looking at a stranger.

"Yes, you can set down if you want to," said Old Woman Magoun, deeply and harshly.

Lily started and looked at her, as if to make



Digitized by Google

sure that it was her grandmother who spoke. Then she sat down on a stone which was comparatively free of the vines.

"Ain't you goin' to set down, grandma?" Lily asked, timidly.

"No; I don't want to get into that mess," replied her grandmother. "I ain't tired. I'll stand here."

Lily sat still; her delicate little face was flushed with heat. She extended her tiny feet in her best shoes and gazed at them. "My shoes are all over dust," said she.

"It will brush off," said her grandmother, still in that strange voice.

Lily looked around. An elm-tree in the field behind her cast a spray of branches over her head; a little cool puff of wind came on her face. She gazed at the low mountains on the horizon, in the midst of which she lived, and she sighed, for no reason that she knew. She began idly picking at the blackberry-vines; there were no berries on them; then she put her little fingers on the berries of the deadly nightshade. "These look like nice berries," she said.

Old Woman Magoun, standing stiff and straight in the road, said nothing.

"They look good to eat," said Lily.



Digitized by Google

Old Woman Magoun still said nothing, but she looked up into the ineffable blue of the sky, over which spread at intervals great white clouds shaped like wings.

Lily picked some of the deadly nightshade berries and ate them. "Why, they are real sweet," said she. "They are nice." She picked some more and ate them.

Presently her grandmother spoke. "Come," she said, "it is time we were going. I guess you have set long enough."

Lily was still eating the berries when she slipped down from the wall and followed her grandmother obediently up the road.

Before they reached home, Lily complained of being very thirsty. She stopped and made a little cup of a leaf and drank long at a mountain brook. "I am dreadful dry, but it hurts me to swallow," she said to her grandmother when she stopped drinking and joined the old woman waiting for her in the road. Her grandmother's face seemed strangely dim to her. She took hold of Lily's hand as they went on. "My stomach burns," said Lily, presently. "I want some more water."

"There is another brook a little farther on," said Old Woman Magoun, in a dull voice.



Digitized by Google

When they reached that brook, Lily stopped and drank again, but she whimpered a little over her difficulty in swallowing. "My stomach burns, too," she said, walking on, "and my throat is so dry, grandma." Old Woman Magoun held Lily's hand more tightly. "You hurt me holding my hand so tight, grandma," said Lily, looking up at her grandmother, whose face she seemed to see through a mist, and the old woman loosened her grasp.

When at last they reached home, Lily was very ill. Old Woman Magoun put her on her own bed in the little bedroom out of the kitchen. Lily lay there and moaned, and Sally Jinks came in.

"Why, what ails her?" she asked. "She looks feverish."

Lily unexpectedly answered for herself. "I ate some sour apples and drank some milk," she moaned.

"Sour apples and milk are dreadful apt to hurt anybody," said Sally Jinks. She told several people on her way home that Old Woman Magoun was dreadful careless to let Lily eat such things.

Meanwhile Lily grew worse. She suffered cruelly from the burning in her stomach, the



Digitized by Google

vertigo, and the deadly nausea. "I am so sick, I am so sick, grandma," she kept moaning. She could no longer see her grandmother as she bent over her, but she could hear her talk.

Old Woman Magoun talked as Lily had never heard her talk before, as nobody had ever heard her talk before. She spoke from the depths of her soul; her voice was as tender as the coo of a dove, and it was grand and exalted. "You'll feel better very soon, little Lily," said she.

"I am so sick, grandma."

"You will feel better very soon, and then—"

"I am sick."

"You shall go to a beautiful place."

Lily moaned.

"You shall go to a beautiful place," the old woman went on.

"Where?" asked Lily, groping feebly with her cold little hands. Then she moaned again.

"A beautiful place, where the flowers grow tall."

"What color? Oh, grandma, I am so sick."

"A blue color," replied the old woman. Blue was Lily's favorite color. "A beautiful blue color, and as tall as your knees, and the flowers always stay there, and they never fade."



Digitized by Google

"Not if you pick them, grandma? Oh!"

"No, not if you pick them; they never fade, and they are so sweet you can smell them a mile off; and there are birds that sing, and all the roads have gold stones in them, and the stone walls are made of gold."

"Like the ring grandpa gave you? I am so sick, grandma."

"Yes, gold like that. And all the houses are built of silver and gold, and the people all have wings, so when they get tired walking they can fly, and—"

"I am so sick, grandma."

"And all the dolls are alive," said Old Woman Magoun. "Dolls like yours can run, and talk, and love you back again."

Lily had her poor old rag doll in bed with her, clasped close to her agonized little heart. She tried very hard with her eyes, whose pupils were so dilated that they looked black, to see her grandmother's face when she said that, but she could not. "It is dark," she moaned, feebly.

"There where you are going it is always light," said the grandmother, "and the commonest things shine like that breastpin Mrs. Lawyer Mason had on to-day."



Digitized by Google

Lily moaned pitifully, and said something incoherent. Delirium was commencing. Presently she sat straight up in bed and raved; but even then her grandmother's wonderful compelling voice had an influence over her.

"You will come to a gate with all the colors of the rainbow," said her grandmother; "and it will open, and you will go right in and walk up the gold street, and cross the field where the blue flowers come up to your knees, until you find your mother, and she will take you home where you are going to live. She has a little white room all ready for you, white curtains at the windows, and a little white looking-glass, and when you look in it you will see—"

"What will I see? I am so sick, grandma."

"You will see a face like yours, only it's an angel's; and there will be a little white bed, and you can lay down an' rest."

"Won't I be sick, grandma?" asked Lily. Then she moaned and babbled wildly, although she seemed to understand through it all what her grandmother said.

"No, you will never be sick any more. Talkin' about sickness won't mean anything to you."

It continued. Lily talked on wildly, and her grandmother's great voice of soothing never



Digitized by Google

ceased, until the child fell into a deep sleep, or what resembled sleep; but she lay stiffly in that sleep, and a candle flashed before her eyes made no impression on them.

Then it was that Nelson Barry came. Jim Willis waited outside the door. When Nelson entered he found Old Woman Magoun on her knees beside the bed, weeping with dry eyes and a might of agony which fairly shook Nelson Barry, the degenerate of a fine old race.

"Is she sick?" he asked, in a hushed voice.

Old Woman Magoun gave another terrible sob, which sounded like the gasp of one dying.

"Sally Jinks said that Lily was sick from eating milk and sour apples," said Barry, in a tremulous voice. "I remember that her mother was very sick once from eating them."

Lily lay still, and her grandmother on her knees shook with her terrible sobs.

Suddenly Nelson Barry started. "I guess I had better go to Greenham for a doctor if she's as bad as that," he said. He went close to the bed and looked at the sick child. He gave a great start. Then he felt of her hands and reached down under the bedclothes for her little feet. "Her hands and feet are like ice," he cried out. "Good God! why didn't you send



Digitized by Google

for some one—for me—before? Why, she's dying; she's almost gone!"

Barry rushed out and spoke to Jim Willis, who turned pale and came in and stood by the bedside.

"She's almost gone," he said, in a hushed whisper.

"There's no use going for the doctor; she'd be dead before he got here," said Nelson, and he stood regarding the passing child with a strange, sad face—unutterably sad, because of his incapability of the truest sadness.

"Poor little thing, she's past suffering, anyhow," said the other man, and his own face also was sad with a puzzled, mystified sadness.

Lily died that night. There was quite a commotion in Barry's Ford until after the funeral, it was all so sudden, and then everything went on as usual. Old Woman Magoun continued to live as she had done before. She supported herself by the produce of her tiny farm; she was very industrious, but people said that she was a trifle touched, since every time she went over the log bridge with her eggs or her garden vegetables to sell in Greenham, she carried with her, as one might have carried an infant, Lily's old rag doll.



Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# ELIZA SAM

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# ELIZA SAM

MY neighbors are mostly women. There used to be men enough years ago, when I was a boy and a young man, but they have all died out or moved away. Now you can go up and down the street, and it's nothing but women except in a few houses. And some of the men that's left are travelling week in and week out, and might as well not live here. And some are so old and feeble, like old man Ames and Abraham Jones, that they don't count for much. Sometimes when I think of it, it seems to me just like an Indian village that I've read about, when the men are all off hunting, and fishing, and fighting. I s'pose I'd have to do most of the defending hearth and home if the enemy came, if there was an enemy, although I suppose I could count some on Eliza Sam.

Her real name ain't Eliza Sam; it is Eliza



Digitized by Google

Hunt. She's called Eliza Sam to distinguish her from other Eliza Hunts. There are three in this village, and they have to have their fathers' and husbands' names tacked on to theirs to tell 'em apart. Eliza Sam wasn't never married and her father's name was Sam. He died about five years ago. He kept the sawmill. Beside Eliza Sam, there is Eliza John and Eliza Caleb. Eliza John is married to a man by the name of John, and Eliza Caleb ain't married, never was, and is never like to be, but they have tacked Caleb onto her name to tell her from the others. Nearly half this village is made up of Hunts. I am a Hunt, but I ain't related to the Elizas near enough to say so.

I don't believe anybody could trace out the relationship betwixt Eliza Sam and me. I know her father used to try to. He had a picture of a genealogical tree hanging up in his parlor; hangs there now, though he's dropped into his grave. If ever a tree grew in a graveyard it's a genealogical one. He used to be fond of trying to point out to me whereabouts I came in, but he couldn't make out much. "It's here, or here, or here, Henry," he used to say, pointing to one little twig after another, but he never knew which I was. He lost the trail at



Digitized by Google

the divide of the branches somewhere, back where an Emmons come into the Hunt family. It never seemed much account to me, and I miss my guess if it did to Eliza Sam, but it pleased the old man, and we used to stand there and let him talk. I trimmed a long birch stick for him to use for a pointer when he talked about his tree. I never see that tree now but it seems as if he must be standing in front of it, only there's something the matter with my own eyes.

However, I don't go in there very much, now the old man is gone. Eliza Sam lives there alone and folks might talk, if we ain't as young as we might be. I guess there ain't any age limit to tongues. I want to be careful, for I have always thought a good deal of Eliza Sam. She's too big and up-and-comin' lookin' to suit some, but I don't mind her being outspoken and wanting to have her own way. Women folks always want to have their own way, and I don't know as they are any the worse for owning right up to it, the way Eliza Sam does, than to sort of mince around and get at it sideways. I believe in broadsides and open assaults, and no sneaking under cover of bushes, whether it is a man, or a woman, or a nation. I don't



Digitized by Google

like the Injun way of doing things. Whenever Eliza Sam has wanted anything she has always taken a bee-line for it, chin up, and petticoats flying in the wind. And mostly she's got it, but not always. There's things that can't be got in this world, whether you work by hook or crook.

There's pricks for kickers and pricks for sidlers, and Eliza Sam has met hers as well as the rest of us. But she ain't cried out nor made any fuss about it; she ain't lost a pound of flesh nor an atom of the handsome red color in her cheeks. Eliza Sam is a heavy woman. She must weigh a hundred and seventy odd, though she ain't exactly stout. She has a large frame, and she has enough bone and muscle to take the wind out of a good many men in the village—and she has done it, too. I know one man who used to get up and sidle out of the grocery store of an evening whenever Eliza Sam's name came up. He's moved away now, out West, and all his folks. He's married out there I've heard, and they're talkin' of runnin' him for Congress. Well, he'll get there, if sticking to it whether or no, without considering if folks want him or not, has anything to do with it. It never made any difference to him



Digitized by Google

what other folks wanted as long as he did, and generally he got his way; but once he didn't, because he reckoned without Eliza Sam.

It was after her father died, and she was known to own the place clear, and have a nice sum in bank beside some Old Colony railroad shares. He had never married, and had his mother and two old-maid sisters on his hands, and it struck him he would do well to get Eliza Sam. So he begun courting her. Eliza Sam didn't want him, and acted dreadful offish from the very first of it, but that didn't make any difference to him. It wasn't what she wanted, but what he wanted. He'd made up his mind to marry her, and wasn't going to be stopped by any such little thing as her not wanting to marry him.

He lay in wait for her everywhere she went. She couldn't step into the post-office nor the store but there he was running alongside her, looking up in her face with that everlasting smirk of his, which seemed dreadful mild and gentle, but covered grit as sharp as needles. He was a good deal smaller than Eliza Sam, and he wore his hair rather long, and his coat-tails lengthier than common, and they had a way of catching the wind and waving when every-



Digitized by Google

thing else was still, and his hair always waved on account of a queer little teeter in his walk. Eliza Sam, when he used to appear beside her, would scarcely look at him, nor treat him decent, and any man with a mite of self-respect would have taken the hint, but he wouldn't. He kept on going to see her regular, though she got so she wouldn't go to the door to let him in. But that didn't make any difference; he just walked in anyhow. Once Eliza Sam came down-stairs an hour after she'd seen him coming in her gate, and there he was setting in her parlor smirking up at her. Finally she kept her door locked, and then he set on the doorstep. It got so Eliza Sam couldn't go out the front door without stepping careful and looking, to be sure she wouldn't stumble over that man.

Well, finally she got to the end of her patience one Sunday night in November; an awful cold night, threatening snow—it did snow before morning. He used to wait every Sunday evening after meeting to go home with her. It didn't make any difference that she didn't speak to him, he went just the same. That Sunday night she got desperate. I haven't mentioned something that may sound queer about Eliza Sam; she is the sexton of the church. I never



Digitized by Google

knew of any village that had a woman sexton before, but when Eliza Sam's father died, there didn't seem to be any man handy to take his place, so they put Eliza in as sexton. She'd been doing about all the work about the church before, she was plenty strong enough, and there wasn't any reason why she shouldn't have the place as well as a man. So Eliza was sweeping, and making the fires, and ringing the bell, and she gave perfect satisfaction except for being a little ahead of time, and gettin' folks to meeting a quarter of an hour too early now and then, and putting a linen towel over the top of the pulpit to save the velvet, and a tidy on the back of the parson's sofa, and a braided mat in front of the communion-table. Folks didn't think those things looked quite appropriate, but Eliza Sam was firm. She said the velvet on the pulpit and the sofa was getting all worn out, and there was a thin place in the carpet, and she had her way. The minister's wife tried to get the tidy and the towel off at the conference of churches, but she couldn't fetch it.

Well, that November night—it was the week before Thanksgiving—he lay in wait for Eliza Sam just as usual, hanging around the door while she shut up the church and saw to



Digitized by Google

the fires; then she came out, and there he was alongside. Then she faced him.

"See here," said she, "what be you here for?"

"Why, I'm going home with you, Eliza," says he, smirking up at her.

"What be you a-going home with me for?" says she.

"Why, to protect you, Eliza," says he.

"Protect your grandmother!" says she. "Now, sir, I want you to understand once for all I don't want you to go home with me. I have no need of your protection nor your society."

He didn't say anything, but he just smirked up at her, and he went right along.

"Did you hear me?" says Eliza Sam.

He just smirked up at her again and tucked his hand through her arm. Then she got desperate. She didn't say another word, but she just turned about, and she begun walking down the old road to Clifford; they had passed it a little ways back. The wind was in their faces, and it was bitter cold; hadn't moderated enough to snow. Well, she walked on and on, with him hold of her arm. Didn't try to shake him off or nothing, but just went on. Finally



Digitized by Google

he speaks, kind of timid. "Do you know this ain't the way home, Eliza Sam?" says he.

She didn't make no reply. She just went on. She was dressed real warm, and she never felt the cold much anyway. He was always a real shivery son of man, and he hadn't got on his winter overcoat.

Presently he spoke again. "Guess you took the wrong turn without meaning to, Eliza Sam," says he. She didn't make any reply, but she walked along with him kind of trailing at her arm.

Finally she begun to think she'd have to carry him if she walked much farther—she'd gone about three miles—and she turned round and walked toward home. He tried to talk then, and be real chipper and agreeable, but she kept her mouth shut tight. She was thinking how she could shake him off. When she got back to the main road, she stopped a minute, then headed for the graveyard on the right, and in she went, dragging him with her. He acted kind of scared then. She said she guessed he begun to think maybe she'd gone clean out of her head.

"Guess you don't know where we're going, Eliza Sam," says he; but she didn't say anything,



Digitized by Google

just went right on, stumbling over the graves. It was quite a dark night. Well, she couldn't shake him off that way, though she sat down on an old flat tombstone in the Greenaway lot as much as fifteen minutes, with the wind right in their faces, with him side of her. He tried putting his arm around her waist, but she sat up so straight and stiff that he settled back, and hemmed, and acted as if he hadn't meant to. He kept asking her if she wasn't afraid of catching cold, but she said never one word.

Presently she rose up and straight back to the church she went. She took the key out of her pocket and unlocked the door, and went in with him at her heels, he asking real gentle and timid if she'd left anything, and if she was afraid the fires wasn't fixed right. She never spoke, but in she went, and kind of thrust him off her arm when she went through the door. The church was as dark as a pocket. She just slipped past him, and before he knew it she was outside, and had locked him in. Then she went off home and left him. She could hear him calling after her kind of feeble, but she let him call.

Well, Eliza Sam left him there till about two o'clock in the morning. Then she begun to get uneasy. The wind was rising all the time,



Digitized by Google

and the snow coming thick. She begun to think maybe his mother and sisters were sitting up watching for him, and that she was punishing them more than him. So she got up and dressed herself, and came through the snow to my window. I lived right across the street, alone except for dogs. I had five beside a numper of puppies at the time.

One of the dogs begun to bark, then the others joined in and woke me up, and I raised my window and looked out, and there was Eliza Sam standing under the window with the storm driving past her. I didn't know her at first.

"Who is it?" said I.

"It's me—Eliza Sam," says she.

Then I knew her right away. "What's the matter?" says I.

Then she told me what she'd done, speaking kind of quick and trembly, for Eliza Sam is a woman after all, and though she has spunk enough to do things another woman wouldn't, she can't get over being scared at them afterward.

"I'm dreadful afraid his mother and Maria and Jane are sitting up worrying about him," says she, "and I hate to ask you, but I wish you would go and let him out. I started to go



Digitized by Google

myself, then I didn't know but he would insist on seeing me home after all, in spite of me, and I guess it would be better for you to go."

"You just lay that key on the window-sill under this one, Eliza," says I, "and go home and go to bed; I'll see him home." I was so mad I could scarcely speak.

Well, I let him out. He looked kind of white and scared, though he'd been warm and comfortable enough, and he went home, trudging through the snow in his thin overcoat. I didn't waste many words on him, but it didn't take me long to tell him what I thought of him. However, he didn't seem to sense it. He sort o' stared at me, and muttered something that I didn't hear, and went off, and he never troubled Eliza Sam again. But the story got around the village, and he didn't have much peace till he moved away. He sold out his store—he kept the jewelry store—and put up his house at auction. His mother had died in the mean time, and one of his sisters got married, and he went away with Maria.

Folks laughed and thought it was real cute in Eliza Sam, and upheld her in what she did, but I guess it made the men sort of afraid of her. At any rate, nobody else offered to pay her any



Digitized by Google

attention, though it was a fine place for any man. He would have been well fixed in that nice house, and Eliza was a good housekeeper and a splendid cook, besides being as good a woman as ever lived. But even a man who means well, and ain't any idea of not doing what's right, don't just like the notion of being held in with such a tight rein in case he should feel like kicking over the traces. But there wasn't a man in the village who didn't have respect for Eliza Sam, and straighten himself to look as well as he could when he saw her coming.

And as for other women, they all like Eliza Sam, and I know one woman who, unless I miss my guess, would go down on her kees and about worship her any minute, and that's Roger Little's wife. She was Ada Dean before Little married her, and she was the prettiest girl in the village, and had her pick of all the likely young men, and chose the one that wasn't likely, as usual. She would have Roger Little, though all her folks were set against it, and it fairly killed her mother. She died not long after Ada was married, and the poor child never got over it. She had begun to see her mistake by that time, and her pretty light ways were changed for old sober ones. I met her on the



Digitized by Google

street and hardly knew her, and other folks spoke of doing the same. Roger Little wasn't a man to make any girl happy, least of all a little meek, sensitive one like Ada Dean. He came of the best old family in the village, the old Squire Roger's, and he had had a college education and plenty of money to start with, and good looks, but he's wasted everything. His money was soon gone, and his good looks going, and his education had been of small account to him, and his father, old Captain Richard Little, as fine an old man as ever lived, had about given him up and decided to leave his money away from him to foreign missions. He talked with me about it one night going home from meeting; we came out about the same time, and he was feeling sort of down-hearted, and I suppose inclined to free his mind to somebody, though it wasn't his way generally. Captain Richard was a rather gruff, keep-his-troubles-to-himself sort of a man, but the time comes to everybody when they have to speak to some other human being or give up beat. I sort of wondered at Captain Richard speaking to me, for I was a good deal younger than he was, though way ahead of his son Roger. However, I had the name of keeping things to



Digitized by Google

myself pretty well, and I wasn't married, and didn't have any women-folks to talk to, and I suppose he thought I was safe, and I never did tell a soul as long as the old man lived, though it couldn't have done any harm as I know of if I had, as things turned out.

Captain Richard told me that night with a hoarse growl in his throat, the way a man's voice is when he's full of grief and ain't giving way to it, that he'd about decided to make his will and leave his money away from Roger. "He's my only son, Henry," says he, "and it seems a pretty hard thing to do, but it's money that has come by good honest labor, for I didn't inherit much with the depreciation of real estate in this town, and I have it in trust from the Lord, and I can't let it be squandered by a drunkard and a spendthrift. I know if anything happens to my son that his wife will be taken care of, for her father has enough, and is going to settle it on her. My money left to my son's wife away from him would only make trouble betwixt them, and I'm going to leave it to foreign missions, and I may ask you to come over and be a witness some day, Henry," says he, "and I'm telling you all this so there won't be any question of will-breaking and



Digitized by Google

sanity afterward. It don't seem as if my son would ever think of breaking his father's will," says he, "but when a man gets started downhill, snags in the way only make him go faster. I'm going to give Roger one more chance," says he; "it's about six weeks since he's been doing anything, and next week he's called on that arson case at Southbridge (Roger Little is a lawyer), and if he's sober and in his right mind and able to be there, I'll wait a while longer about that will; otherwise I sha'n't. I've just been over there, Henry," the old man wound up, "and he was away; had been away all night, the Lord knows where, and that poor little wife of his a-crying—"

Well, Captain Richard didn't say any more; he gave a great grunt, as if he'd been facing something he hated; then he went off, and I heard his tramp, tramp down the street—the Captain was a heavy man, and his energy seemed to add a third to his weight when he walked.

I wondered whether Roger Little would come to time for that arson trial; it was only three days off, and I knew from what I'd heard that he'd been doing pretty bad. It seemed to me it was doubtful, and it was, and he would



Digitized by Google

never have done it if it hadn't been for Eliza Sam. The trial was set for Wednesday, and Tuesday Roger Little was laying fast asleep on account of the liquor he'd been drinking, and he had another great bottle of port wine ready to drink on the stand beside the bed when he woke up. It was a queer thing, but Roger Little wouldn't get drunk on a thing but nice wine. He hated whiskey and rum like all possessed, and said he'd go to the devil like a gentleman anyhow. Drinking such costly stuff made his money go faster. Often he wouldn't touch a thing except champagne. Well, there he lay, about four o'clock in the afternoon, when Eliza Sam came in. She was going by when she heard Roger's wife crying, the bedroom window being open.

Eliza Sam went right in, went through the sitting-room to the bedroom, and stood there in the door.

"What's the matter?" says she.

Roger's wife she came forward with her hand up, looking back sort of scared at her husband; he was apt to wake up cross, if he did get drunk on such high-priced wines.

"He's asleep," says she, in a whisper, and catching her breath with a sob.



Digitized by Google

"I don't care if I do wake him; I ain't afraid of him," says Eliza Sam.

She and Ada went out in the sitting-room, and Ada, though she could scarcely speak for crying, told her how the trial was coming off the next day, and Roger wouldn't be able to go, sure, and worse than all, she had just had word that the old Captain was coming down to see how his son was getting on.

"It's poor Roger's last chance," says Roger's wife. "Father Little told him so, and he'll be here any minute, and—he'll see Roger, and it'll be no use my saying Roger is sick to-morrow; he'll—know."

"You wasn't going to lie, were you?" says Eliza Sam.

"I'd do most anything to help Roger," says his wife.

"That wouldn't help him a mite in the long run," says Eliza Sam.

She sat eying Ada a minute, then her eyes begun to twinkle in a way they have when she's got a new idea. She laughed, and Roger's poor wife stared at her.

"I'll see what I can do," says Eliza Sam. With that, up she gets and marches into the bedroom, and catches up that port wine bottle



Digitized by Google

and flings it out of the window into a clump of lilacs.

"There," says she, real loud; but Roger he never stirs,

Roger's wife she just sort of gasps and looks at Eliza Sam, so scared she don't know what to do.

"I don't know what he'll say," says she; "he'll wake up pretty soon and reach out for it, and it's the last bottle but one, and I just fetched it up-stairs."

"The last bottle but one?" says Eliza Sam.

"Yes," says Roger's wife.

"Where is that last one?" says Eliza Sam.

"Down cellar," says Roger's wife, kind of feeble. "Shall I fetch it up?" says she.

"Fetch up your grandmother!" says Eliza Sam, and down cellar she goes, and crash goes that last bottle of port wine into the coal-bin. And then she comes up into the sitting-room all of a twinkle, and she told Roger's wife what she meant to do. They knew about when old Captain Richard would be along, near five o'clock. That would give him time to get home to tea. The old Captain was very regular in his habits. He had tea summer and winter at six



Digitized by Google

o'clock, and he wouldn't let anything make him a minute late.

Well, what happened finally was when old Captain Richard Little came riding into the yard—he always rode horseback, except when he was on his way to and from meeting—somebody that looked just like his Roger—had on his coat and his hat, and was just about his size, and sat in saddle in a way he had, but wasn't Roger, but Eliza Sam in his clothes—rode out of the yard like a spirit, on Roger's black horse right under his nose. The Captain came in jest the second after Eliza went out.

"Hello, hello, Roger!" yells the Captain. But Roger he didn't seem to hear. Then the Captain he went a-riding after, and she flew. The old Captain he tried to catch up till they'd both most got to Southbridge; then he happened to remember that he'd be late to tea if he went any farther, and he turned round and rode back. He just stopped long enough at Roger's to holler to Ada that he guessed Roger would be able to get to the trial next day if he rode as fast as he was doing now. You see, he thoroughly believed Roger was headed for Southbridge on business about the trial. Then he fetched a big laugh and rode on, leaving Roger's wife



Digitized by Google

most fainting. She stayed on in the yard till Eliza Sam came back. She didn't dare to go in the house for fear Roger would wake up and be cross because the wine was gone, let alone his clothes. But he didn't wake up till Eliza was there and standing over him. She didn't wait to change his clothes when poor Ada told her he was stirring and calling out for more wine, and Roger, when he saw that good, handsome woman standing over him in the clothes he'd disgraced, must have thought something had happened. Anyway, half-drunk as he was, he lay still and listened to what she said. She didn't spare him, not a mite. She told him just what he was. Well, the upshot of it was, Roger Little he turned over a new leaf. He went to the trial next day, and he won his case. Then that same night he went to the old Captain, and he made a clean breast of what had happened the day before and what Eliza Sam had done.

"It's the first and last time that a woman is going to run away for me from my own father," says he.

Roger Little has done as well as anybody could expect ever since. He don't drink any to speak of, and he tends to business as well as



Digitized by Google

a man of his turn ever could. He's made quite a name for himself. Sometimes he's fishing when he ought to be studying, but he always fetches up in the court-room. Mebbe if he wasn't himself he might be a Choate or a Webster, but as it is he does pretty well, and we're proud of him, and it's all due to Eliza Sam.

Years ago when Eliza Sam and I were boy and girl — we weren't over sixteen — I used to think she was the prettiest girl anywhere about. Once I sent her a valentine, spent every cent of the money I'd saved to go to the circus, but I never got much satisfaction out of it. She never let on she'd had a valentine, much less thanked me for it. I didn't put my name to it, I was too bashful, and mebbe she never knew where it came from, but I supposed she would.

I used to go home with Eliza Sam before I went home with any other girl, but I was always too afraid of her to kiss her good-bye when we got to her father's gate. All my life, off and on, I have been seeing Eliza Sam home from meeting and sewing-meetings and things, and planning between whiles how I would kiss her at the gate, but I never dared. I had an idea that Eliza Sam of all women would be angry



Digitized by Google

or laugh at me. I didn't know which, but I was sure it would be one of the two.

But at last one night in June we had said good-night, and all of a sudden I picked up courage. I said good-night over again; then I caught hold of her arms, as big as mine in her purple silk sleeve, and I kissed her.

"Good-night, Eliza," says I. Then I waited, I didn't know for what. But all she did was to say, "Good-night, Henry," and walked into the house—and Eliza Sam and I are going to get married before long, though we haven't told the neighbors.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# FLORA AND HANNAH

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# FLORA AND HANNAH

IT happened a number of years ago, when valentines were made more account of than they are now. Why, in those days some valentines were almost as good as an offer of marriage. I am sure Jonty's was. He meant it for one, and I knew he did. Jonty—his name was Jonathan, but we always called him Jonty — was my husband's youngest brother, and he had lived with me ever since his father died, when he wasn't much more than a baby.

He was twenty years younger than my husband, and we both of us, since we didn't have any children of our own, looked upon him as a son. My husband just set his eyes by his little brother, and he was a pretty boy, with the reddest cheeks and curliest light hair, and he was just as good as he could be, always ready to run errands, get a pail of water, and bring in



Digitized by Google

kindling-wood, starting the minute he was told, and goin' laughin' as if he was tickled to death at havin' a chance to do somethin' for somebody. The way he used to wait on Grandma Page, find her glasses for her, and hold her yarn, was really wonderful in a boy. Grandma Page was his and Caleb's — my husband's — great-grandmother. She was pretty old when Jonty came to live with us, and when that happened about the valentine she was near ninety, but one of the prettiest old ladies you ever saw, cheeks as pink as a girl's, and her white hair all wavy, and she wore the nicest white caps, with lavender ribbons on them. We were proud of Grandma Page, and she was one of those little, gentle, delicate, clinging creatures that everybody loves and pets. People used to say she didn't have much force, and couldn't do anything but knit and look peaceful and pretty, but she wasn't half the care that most old people are. When my husband died, Jonty was most twenty-five years old, and it was the greatest comfort to me that I had him and Grandma Page. Jonty he took hold and run the farm just as smart, and we got along well, and had plenty of everything, though I was sad enough sometimes.



Digitized by Google

I felt dreadful sober when Jonty came to me that afternoon about the valentine. It made me think of the time when Caleb sent me a valentine, for one thing; and then I couldn't help feeling a little sad that Jonty should be thinkin' of some other woman beside his grandma and me, though I knew it was for the best if he got a good wife and helpmate.

But I tried to look as cheerful as I could. Jonty didn't act half as silly and ashamed in asking me as some boys would have acted. He was always real honest and simple and outspoken, and never seemed to see any reason for being ashamed of anything that was right. He never colored up a mite, though his cheeks were always like roses, as bright as a girl's, and he laughed kind of sweet and pleasant when he showed me the little sheet of gilt-edged paper with a bunch of rosebuds in the corner, that was to go with the handsomest valentine I ever laid my eyes on. There was paper cut somehow so you could lift it up in a sort of spiral twist and see underneath a couple seated in an arbor all covered with roses. What Jonty wanted was a little poem written on that sheet of paper. "Can't you do it, Aunt Jane?" said he, in his coaxing way. He always called



Digitized by Google

me "Aunt," though I was really his sister-in-law.

"Why, my land, Jonty, I don't believe I can," said I. "I'm afraid I'll spoil this beautiful paper."

"Oh no, you won't," said he. "Do, Aunt Jane."

Now I have really had quite a name for writing poetry, and once a piece on the death of Deacon Griggs' wife was published in the paper, but I have written mostly in albums and for people on the deaths of relatives and friends, and then they would keep them in their family Bibles. Why, there was one spell when it seemed to me that nobody died that I wasn't called upon to write a poem about it. But I hadn't never written a valentine in my life, and I was dreadful doubtful. I was afraid of spoiling that handsome paper. But I wrote it all off on a slate first, and finally I wrote quite a good piece, though I do say so, and Jonty he copied it, and signed his name.

"I s'pose I know who it's going to?" said I.

"Yes, it's Flora," said Jonty, laughing, but just as honest as if he was a child. Grandma Page was knittin' in the corner, and she hadn't paid any attention to what was going on. She



Digitized by Google

had grown so dreadful hard of hearin' within a year we had to shout to make her hear anything.

I knew well enough that the valentine was going to Flora before I asked Jonty. She was the prettiest girl in the town, and all the young men were wild about her. Nobody looked at her sister Hannah, though she was a nice girl. Sometimes I used to think maybe she would be full as nice to get along with as Flora, though she did have a dull skin, and dull-colored hair, and a homely nose. Hannah hadn't a good feature in her face except her eyes, which were as brown and honest as a good dog's. Flora, beside her, looked all shine and pink and white and gold. She was tall and of a fine shape, too, and Hannah was under-size. Both girls used to be in our house a good deal, and grandma and I thought a lot of them. Grandma used to say that Flora was a pretty cretur, but you could depend on Hannah.

Well, after Jonty's valentine was finished he left it on the sitting-room table, and went out to see a man who had come to ask about some wood, and I went out in the kitchen to bake some cake. Pretty soon I saw Grandma Page, with her big gray shawl on and her white



Digitized by Google

hood, kind of rockin' down the front walk in a way she had. I thought to myself I guessed she was goin' to run into Mrs. Atkins's. She used to do that quite often; it was only a step down the street, and she wasn't feeble at all.

In a little while Jonty came through the kitchen on his way to the sitting-room to get his valentine. Then he come runnin' back. "Why, where is it, Aunt Jane?" said he.

"Why, ain't it there on the table where you left it?" said I.

"No, it ain't," said he.

"Why, that's dreadful funny," said I. I wiped the flour off my hands, and went in to look, but there was no valentine there. We searched everywhere, but we couldn't find it. When Grandma came back we questioned her; then the mystery was solved, as we supposed. She said, in her little, soft, innocent way, like an old baby's, that she had been down to the post-office thinking there might be a letter from Edward—Edward was her son out West—and she had posted the valentine. Well, there wasn't anything so strange about it. The post-office was next door to Mrs. Atkins's. Grandma often went there, and often posted letters, but



Digitized by Google

it did seem a little odd that she should have taken the valentine. However, Jonty thanked her in his sweet way, and we supposed everything was all right.

After supper that night Hannah came in. Grandma had gone to bed, and Jonty had run down to the store on an errand. I saw in a minute that something had happened. Hannah didn't look like herself. Her dull cheeks were pink, her eyes shone, and she looked almost pretty.

"Oh, Aunt Jane," she said—she always called me Aunt Jane—"I saw him go past and knew he wasn't here, or I wouldn't have come!"

"What do you mean? What is the matter, child?" said I, for she was laughing and crying all together.

"I had to tell somebody, I was so happy," said she, "and Flora has got Mark Williams calling on her, and mother is away, and—"

"Why, what is it?—what has happened?" said I.

"Oh, don't you—don't you know?" said she.

"No, I don't," said I.

"Jonty has sent me a valentine," she whispered. Then down her head went on my lap, and she cried and cried for pure joy. "Oh,



Digitized by Google

Aunt Jane," she sobbed out, "I never thought anybody would love me. I thought it would always be Flora and now it's me, and—I've always thought Jonty was better than anybody else. Oh, Aunt Jane, I'm not half good enough for him; I wish I was pretty like Flora, but I do love Jonty and I will try to make him happy."

I was so bewildered I didn't know what to do. I put my hand on the girl's head, and tried to hush her, and then I heard a noise and looked up, and there was Jonty standing in the door, and he had heard every word. And Hannah looked up and saw him, and sprang to her feet, and ran straight to him, and was sobbing on his shoulder.

I shall never forget Jonty's face as he looked at me over her head. He was so kind and gentle that, in all his bewilderment, his arm had gone 'round the poor little thing, and he was stroking her head as if she had been a lost kitten. And I shall never forget the sound of my own voice, it was so queer and faint as I said to him:

"Hannah says she's got a valentine from you, Jonty."

Well, Jonty soothed and coaxed her, and took her home, and when he came back his face was



Digitized by Google

as white as a sheet. He sat down opposite me, and looked at me, and I at him.

"What be you goin' to do, Jonty?" said I.

"I ain't goin' to break that poor little thing's heart, and Mark Williams is over there with Flora, and—I don't believe she has ever had much choice betwixt us, and—and—she ain't never acted as if she thought as much of me as this."

"You ain't goin' to marry Hannah when it's Flora you want?" said I, for I thought he was carryin' it too far.

"Yes, I be, unless I see that Flora is goin' to be upset over it," said he.

And he did. Mark Williams married Flora —but I always suspected she would full as soon have had Jonty, but she was never a girl to cry for one fiddle when she could get another —and Jonty married Hannah. Hannah has made him a splendid wife, and there ain't been a happier family in the village than ours.

But one thing always puzzled Jonty and me, though we never said a word to Hannah about it. We could not understand how Jonty ever happened to direct that valentine envelope to Hannah instead of Flora. He said he could



Digitized by Google

almost take his Bible oath that he hadn't. He used often to talk to me about it, and say that he knew now that Hannah was the wife for him and made him happier than Flora could ever have done, but he couldn't understand about that valentine. "Hannah has got it and I have seen it," said he, "but she took it out of the envelope and made a little silk case for it with two doves and a sprig of myrtle embroidered on the outside, like one her cousin had, and the envelope is gone, but I must have written Hannah instead of Flora. Sometimes it seems supernatural when I look at Hannah and see what a dear good wife I've got," said Jonty.

Well, we never discovered the mystery of that valentine till Grandma died two years after Jonty and Hannah were married. She had a shock and lost her speech, and lay so five days before she died. One day, about a week after the funeral, Jonty was lookin' at her old Bible, the one she always kept in her room on the little stand by her bed, and he gave a great start. "What is it, Jonty?" said I. Hannah was out in the kitchen getting supper, and we were in the sitting-room.

"Look here, Aunt Jane," said Jonty.



Digitized by Google

And I looked, and there in Grandma's Bible, pinned to the chapter of Proverbs where it says that "The heart of her husband can safely trust in her," was the envelope of the old valentine directed to Flora.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# A NEW-YEAR'S RESOLUTION

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# A NEW-YEAR'S RESOLUTION

MY brother Lemuel married Mehitable Pierce when he was quite along in years. Nobody thought he'd ever get married at all, any more'n my brother Reuben and Silas. The three had lived together and kept bachelors' hall ever since our mother died. I was married and away from home long before she died. I didn't know how they would get along at first, but all of the boys had been used to helpin' ma a good deal, and they were real handy, and when I asked if they wasn't goin' to have a housekeeper, they wouldn't hear to it. They said they wasn't goin' to have no strange women round in ma's place, nohow. So Silas he took hold and did the washin' and ironin', and Reuben did the sweepin', and Lemuel (he was the youngest, next to me) did the cookin'. He could cook a dinner equal to any woman, and



Digitized by Google

his pies beat mine. My husband said so, and I had to give in that they did.

Well, they seemed to get along so nice, and none of 'em had ever seemed to think much about the girls, not even when they was boys, that I must say I was astonished when Lemuel he up and got married to Mehitable Pierce. She was a little along in years, too, rather more so than Lemuel, and a dreadful smart piece. She was good-lookin' and she had property, but she was dreadful smart and up an' comin'. I could never see how Lemuel ever got the courage to ask her to have him; he was always a kind of mild-spoken little fellow. Reuben he declared he didn't. He vowed that Mehitable asked him herself. He said he knew it for a fact, and he said it with the tears runnin' down his cheeks. Reuben was the oldest, and he'd always been terrible fond of Lemuel. "That poor boy would never have got in sech a fix ef that woman hadn't up an' asked him, an' he didn't have spunk enough to say no," said Reuben, and he swallered hard.

Mehitable had a nice house of her own that her father left her, all furnished and everything, so, of course, Lemuel he went to live with her, and Mehitable's house was pretty near where I



Digitized by Google

lived, so I could see everything that was goin' on. It wa'n't very long before I said to Hannah Morse, my husband's old-maid sister that lives with us and teaches school, that I believed Lemuel was henpecked, though I hadn't anythin' against Mehitable.

"I don't see what else anybody that married Mehitable Pierce would expect," said Hannah. She spoke real sharp for her. I've always kind of wondered if Hannah would have had Lemuel if he'd asked her.

"Well," said I, "I hope poor Lemuel will be happy. He's always been such a good, mild, willin' boy that it does seem a pity for him to be rode over roughshod, and have all the will he ever did have trodden into the dust."

"Well, that is what will happen, or I'll miss my guess," said Hannah Morse. For a long while I thought she was right. It was really pitiful to see Lemuel. He didn't have no more liberty nor will of his own than a five-year-old boy, and not so much. Mehitable wouldn't let him do this and that, and if there was anythin' he wanted to do she was set against it, and he'd always give right in. Many's the time Lemuel has run over to my house, and his wife come racin' to the fence and screamed after



Digitized by Google

him to come home, and he'd start up as scared as he could be. And many's the time I've been in there, and he started to go out, and she'd tell him to set down, and he'd set without a murmur.

Mehitable she bought all his clothes, an' she favored long-tailed coats, and he bein' such a short man never looked well in 'em, and she wouldn't let him have store shirts and collars, but made them herself, and she didn't have very good patterns: she used her father's old ones, and he wasn't no such built man as Lemuel, and I know he suffered everything, both in his pride an' his feelin's. Lemuel began to look real downtrod. He didn't seem like half such a man as he did, and the queerest thing about it was Mehitable didn't 'pear to like the work of her own hands, so to speak.

One day she talked to me about it. "I dun'no' what 'tis," said she, "but Lemuel he don't seem to have no go ahead and no ambition and no will of his own. He tries to please me, but it don't seem as if he had grit enough even for that. Sometimes I think he ain't well, but I dun'no' what ails him. I've been real careful of him. He's worn thick



Digitized by Google

flannels, and he's had wholesome victuals; I ain't never let him have pie."

"Lemuel was always dreadful fond of pie," said I. I felt kind of sorry, for I remembered how fond poor Lemuel had always been of mother's pies, and what good ones he used to make himself.

"I know it," said Mehitable. "He wanted to make some himself, when we were first married, but I vetoed that. I wasn't goin' to have a man messin' round makin' pies, and I wasn't goin' to have him eatin' of 'em after they were made. Pies ain't good for him. But I declare I dun'no' what does make him act so kind of spiritless. I told him to-day I thought he'd better make a resolution for the New Year and stick to it, and see if it wouldn't put some spunk into him."

Pretty soon she went home. I could see she was real kind of troubled. She always did think a good deal of Lemuel, in spite of everything.

The next day was New Year's, and in the afternoon Mehitable came in again. She didn't have her sewin' as she generally did—she was a very industrious woman. She jest sat down and begun twisting the fringe of her shawl as



Digitized by Google

if she was real nervous. Her face was puckered up, too. "I dun'no' what to make of Lemuel," said she, finally.

"Why, what's the matter?" said I, kind of scared.

"He says he's made a resolution for the New Year," said she, "and that he's goin' to keep it."

"Well, what is it?" said I.

"I dun'no'," said she.

"Well, if it's a good one, you don't care, do you?" said I, "and it couldn't be anythin' but a good one if my brother made it."

"I dun'no' what it is," said she.

"Won't he tell?"

"No, he won't. I can't get a word out of him about it. He don't act like himself."

Well, I must say I never saw such a change as come over Mehitable and Lemuel after that. He wouldn't tell what his resolution was, and she couldn't make him, though she almost went down on her knees. It begun to seem as if she was fairly changin' characters with Lemuel, though she had a spell of bein' herself more'n ever at first, tryin' to force him to tell what that resolution was. Then she give that up, and she never asked him where he was goin', an' he could come in my house an' set jest as long as



Digitized by Google

he wanted to, and she bought him a short-tailed coat and some store collars and shirts, and he looked like another man. He got to stayin' down to the store nights an' talkin' politics with the other men real loud. I heard him myself one night, and I couldn't believe it was Lemuel.

Well, Lemuel he never gave in, and he never told till the next New-Year's Day, when he'd said he would. He'd said all along that he'd tell her then. I'd got most as curious as Mehitable myself by that time, and New-Year's mornin' I run over real early—they wasn't through breakfast. I knew the minute I saw them that he hadn't told. He said he wouldn't till he was through his breakfast. He was most through—was finishing up with a big piece of mince pie, and he'd made it himself, too. When he'd swallowed the last mouthful he looked up and he laughed, real pleasant and sweet, and yet with more manliness than I'd ever seen in him.

"S'pose you want to know what that New-Year's resolution was?" said Lemuel.

"I guess I can stand it awhile longer," said Mehitable. Now the time had come, she didn't want to act too eager, but I showed out jest what I felt.



Digitized by Google

"For the land's sake, Lemuel Babbit, what was it?" said I.

Lemuel he laughed again. "Well, it wasn't much of anythin'," he said, in his gentle, drawlin' way. "I didn't make no resolution, really."

"What, Lemuel Babbit!" cried Mehitable.

"No," said he; "I couldn't think of none to make, so I made a resolution not to tell that I hadn't made any."

THE END

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google